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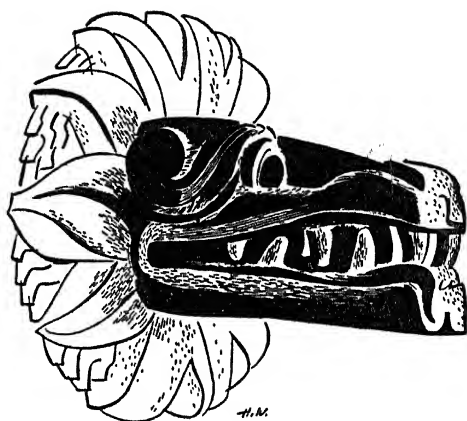
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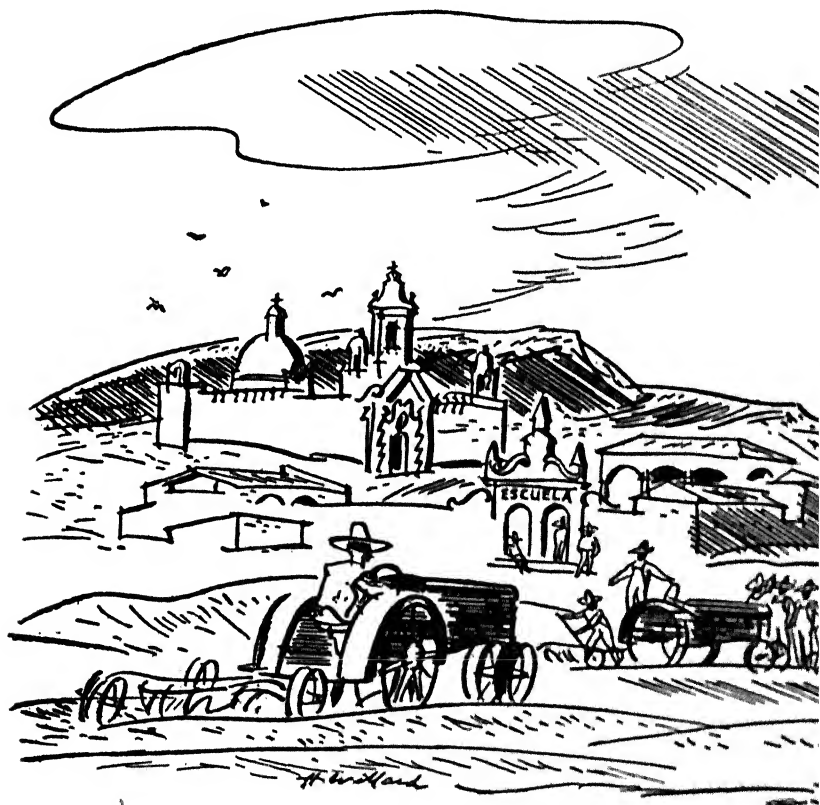






## THE MEXICAN EARTH

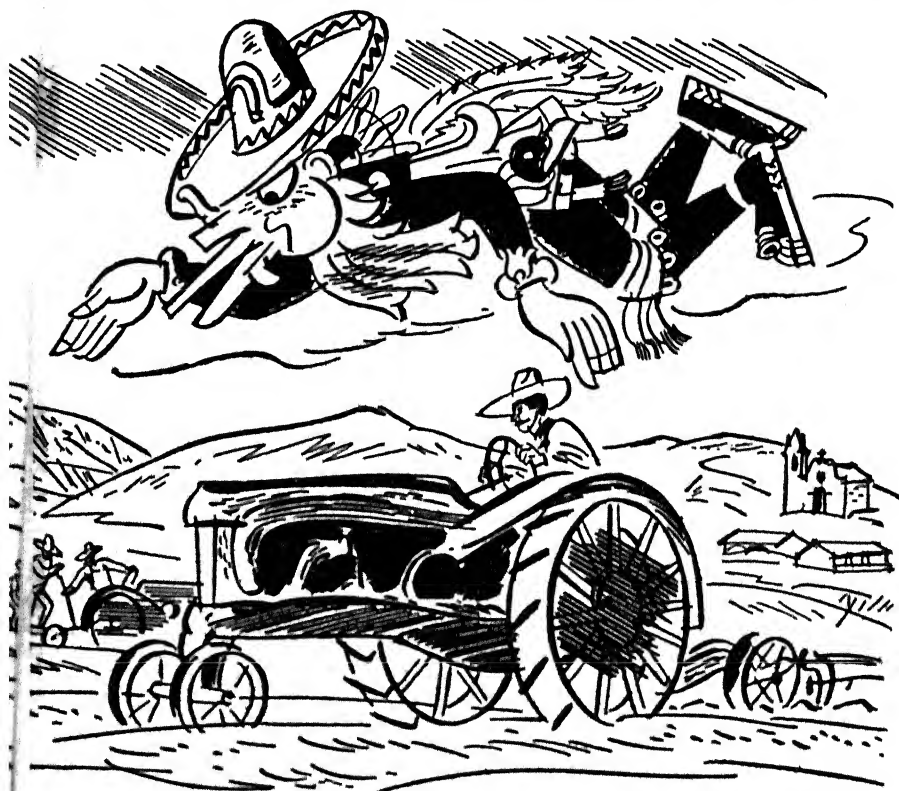
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# THE MEXICAN EARTH

TODD DOWNING

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY HOWARD WILLARD

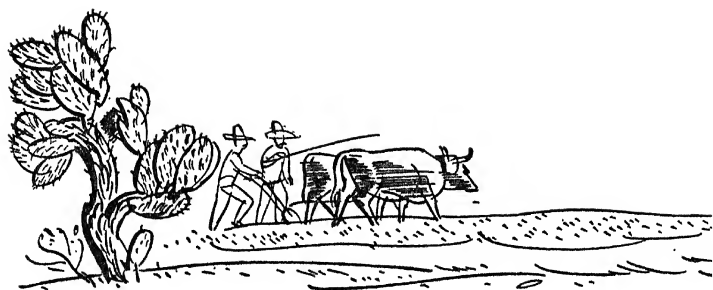


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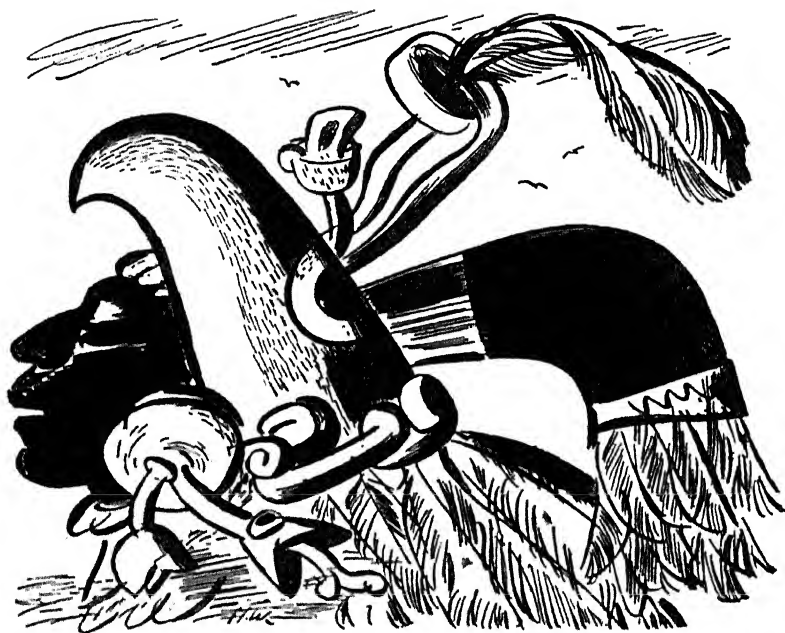
To  
**MARTIN ELMER ERICKSON**

a Swede who knows the truth of the saying:

*"Once the dust of Mexico settles on your heart,  
you can find rest in no other land."*







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## THE MEXICAN EARTH





## CHAPTER I

# Cactus, Orchids, Maguey

BY A BRIDGE on some Mexican road, I have forgotten where, stands a pink *cantina* named El Primer Paso del Otro Lado: "The First Step on the Other Side."

The last time I waited in a line of automobiles for my turn at customs inspection on the International Bridge at Laredo, Texas, I thought how suitably that name would grace a bar, or at least a *chile con carne* parlor, at the end of that drab downhill street of the money-changers.

Two United States immigration officers stood on the walk alongside our car window. One was an old-timer in the border service, I knew by his chrome-leather tan, by the sun wrinkles

etched deeply at the corners of his eyes, by a certain dyspeptic expression which men acquire permanently, they tell me, when they assure the ten thousandth tourist that on his return from Mexico he will be neither vaccinated nor stripped to the skin in a search for contraband. The other fellow was younger and unstamped. Beneath his lightness, I thought, he was considerably shocked as he gave an account of that affair on the international bridge between El Paso and Ciudad Juárez, seven hundred miles or so up the Río Grande, which we found confirmed by the next day's papers. We listened, my companion because he was a newspaperman, I because I thought this another of those tall twisted stories that sprout along the Río Grande. . . .

"Here these three men are, just driving over into Juárez from El Paso. A Mexican policeman stops them. Thinks they're suspicious-looking characters, I suppose. While he's questioning them a Mexican federal officer steps up to the other side of the car and says he'll take charge. The cop tells him to be on his way, that this is his show. Another cop comes up, then the assistant chief of police. The argument over who has jurisdiction gets hotter and hotter, till finally the federal man and one of the police whip out their guns and start shooting at each other. Across the car, mind you! They killed each other, but not before they'd wounded the other two policemen and killed and fatally wounded a couple of the men in the car. Can you beat that?"

The older man stared at something away off, a *zopilote* wheeling low in the hot blue sky perhaps, and his tough face cracked in a slow pleased smile.

"Neat," was all he said.

I felt that I had already taken the first step into Mexico.

Now as one who has criticized press and motion pictures in the United States for giving a wild-West touch to things Mexican, let me say that I cite this incident because it is unusual and, I think, too good to pass up. From it transpires a humor, the Mexican *vacilada*, which seldom went with the

gunplay of our frontier days. One has to dodge no more bullets on the Mexican side of the international bridges than on ours. The greatest danger which I ever encountered in Mexico was from the black cows that come out at nightfall to graze along the highway near Valles. The traveler who is seeking any adventure save intellectual or emotional ones might as well remain in Texas, California or New York. Mexico is safe to the point of monotony.

Mexico has not always been safe, least of all for her own people. They knew violence and death by violence as everyday experiences for so long that they came to accept them: fatalistically but not impassibly, as a less sensitive people would have done. They have built up a defense by becoming connoisseurs of violent death. They have stripped it of its terrors and rigged it up in theatrical cloak and sword or, at the best, in cap and bells. In either case you may be sure that irony is the grease paint of the play.

Much silt has passed under the international bridges since 1927, when General Barrios, once of Pancho Villa's *Dorados*, was captured by government troops in the Gómez-Serrano revolt, court-martialed within the hour and at 4 A.M. sentenced to be shot at 6 A.M.

"That's the correct procedure," said the rebel officer. "In your place I should have done the same." He reached in his pocket and brought out fourteen pesos. "I have only one request to make. I should like to buy a new hat and a *paliacate* (a red handkerchief like a bandanna)."

"Impossible," he was told. "The stores don't open until eight o'clock."

"But a dead man with his jaw hanging isn't a pretty sight."

A soldier rode into town, routed out a storekeeper and returned to the place of execution with hat and *paliacate*. Barrios was smoking, his cigarette pointed at the sky. "Look at the ash," he said when he had finished, "and don't say that I was nervous." The ash was whole. Then he folded the handkerchief over his head, knotted it under his chin, put on the



new hat, straightened the brim and snapped to attention. "*Vámonos.*"

Ballads were composed about that gesture. Nowadays, when men may expect to die in their beds or on their straw *petates*, or in prosaic automobile accidents, the impulse to burlesque the wind-up of all human activities is as strong as ever but suffers from a lack of material on which to exercise itself. So, to stave off anticlimax, Mexicans seize, as I have seized, on such rare incidents as that shooting in Ciudad Juárez. They savor them—and in some way applaud.

Laughter is the best way. That laughter is heard at its clearest and most ironic in the city celebration of the Day of the Dead, but it echoes out of daily conversation and newspaper print, out of contemporary literature, song, caricature. A man enters a *cantina* or a *pulquería* under the sign: "Memories of Tomorrow," "The Reform of Providence," "The Second Coming," "The Pure Grape," "Men Wise Without Study," "The Four Winds," "The Good Fellowships," "My Office," "The Great Duck," "The Machine Gun," "The Inferno," "The Glories of Bacchus," "The Kiss of the Angels," "The Celebrating Monkeys," "The Triumph of the Emotions," "Why Do I Laugh?", "Let's See What Happens." About to cross a bridge, a man sees his purpose mocked by the words: "The First Step on the Other Side."

"You have only to cross the Río Grande and you are in a foreign land where romance beckons," the travel folders state. On the south end of the International Bridge a Mexican official seals the motorist's luggage and waves him on—along a street which is merely a prolongation of the one which he has left in the United States. He has already viewed the landscape which awaits him on the forty-two miles of ruler-straight highway below Nuevo Laredo.

People are always disagreeing about Mexico, so they disagree on what the country looks like. For one writer it has the flat outline of an animal with tail curled about the Gulf of Mexico; for another, of a leg of mutton standing on its

knucklebone; for another, of a cornucopia swelling up from the Isthmus of Tehuantepec to open its mouth at the Río Grande. Motorists will find the metaphor of a boot most apt, I think. High heel and toe are the peninsulas of Lower California and Yucatán, respectively. The eastern coastal plain is the tongue and the Pan American Highway the lace, tied at Nuevo Laredo and zigzagging down to Mexico City.

In relief Mexico has been compared to a sombrero, dented at the crown. That dent, the Valley of Mexico, has been termed the country's navel. A Frenchman, on the train from Vera Cruz, saw himself rising through successive heavens toward the seventh, the snow-capped volcanoes, Popocatepetl and Ixtaccihuatl. A scientist, his mind on the distribution of population, likened Mexico to a spider whose thin legs support the heavy body of the central plateau. Mexico has been called simply one great mountain, its sides the eastern and western ranges of the Sierra Madre. Once the comparison to a mountain is made, that to a pyramid almost inevitably follows.

A Mexican pyramid is an imitation of a mountain, a mountain made symmetrical, with steps to facilitate ascent to the truncated top. More than two thousand years ago men were building pyramids in the Valley of Mexico. It would be strange if some, priests at least, did not see in the slopes falling from that craterlike vantage point the tiers of the mightiest of pyramids: a challenge to them. An inspiration there was, we know, to build higher and ever higher, with the result that few of us in these soft days can scale the Pyramid of the Sun at Teotihuacán without pausing for rest. That pyramid has been restored. There are others whose steps are broken, so that the climber must pick his way with care, winding back and forth, frequently meeting blank walls which force him to descend in order to rise again. Such was the course that engineers had to pursue in cutting the Pan American Highway from base to top of the old pyramid of Mexico, along its weather-worn eastern side. One of the world's great engineering feats, their work has been called. How truly, we

were to recognize by the time we had risen from Nuevo Laredo's five hundred feet to an altitude of 8300, then dropped almost a thousand feet to Mexico City, all by a grade which never exceeds six per cent.

For most, the approach to the base of the Mexican pyramid is a dead and desiccated region, to be faced with groans on the return trip. City dwellers in particular often experience a kind of agoraphobia when dust devils stir in the cactus and mesquite and the very horizon melts away in a shimmer of heat and mirage. Few will admit that there is beauty here, even in the summer months, when rain brings white plumes from the Spanish dagger plants, crinkly white trumpets from the *anacabuitl*, misnamed the "wild olive," violet bells from the gray *cenizo*, flowers of scarlet, rose, crimson, purple, lilac, orange, apricot, yellow from the cacti. It's a precarious beauty, grotesque because it is complemented by the lazily moving blotches on the sky that are scavenging *zopilotes* and by the bleached bones of livestock that failed to find water holes. Here one begins to notice irritating qualities in fast friends with whom he is taking his first long motor trip. Distances between the white posts that mark the number of kilometers to Mexico City seem to lengthen: 1124 . . . 1123 . . . 1122 . . .

Then comes the deserted silver-and-lead mining town of Vallecillo, and with true Mexican dramatic effect the foothills which have been blue-gray blurs on the right, now cloud shadows, now mountains, suddenly march in upon the highway. Moctezuma's daughter stares at the sky over one of the agricultural schools whose significance in regions such as this makes the merely picturesque negligible, and at last the long climb up the pyramid has begun. The person who on the desert was most irritating says something nice and, by the time the corkscrew turns of Mamulique Pass are reached, that jolly accord, almost lost, prevails again. Soon Packsaddle Mountain rears over the smoke of factories and one drives through clouds of yellow butterflies into Monterrey, political capital of

the state of Nuevo León and industrial capital of Mexico.

This is forcing a conceit, I suppose, but to me those butterflies spattering windshield and radiator with chrome-yellow slime tell the story of what has happened to the Metropolitan City of Our Lady of Monterrey, which came into being before the birth of the men and women who sailed on the Mayflower. The cathedral, lifting its gray cross to heaven; the crumbling Bishop's Palace, sentineling the western sky line: these are about the only vestiges of old Monterrey. And the hush of the cathedral is disturbed now by the blare of radios on the Plaza Zaragoza. The terrace of the Obispado is a dance floor where swing music is having its day. The visitor can scarcely glimpse the palms and flowers and orange trees of the Plaza Hidalgo for the advertising cards that sail at him, like those butterflies. "Come to Tony's Place for free samples of his famous mixed drinks." "Stop and get rid of your thirst at Mike's Bar."

Honky-tonk.

Yet ironically and rather pitifully Monterrey is living in the past, a past almost as dead as that which saw Zachary Taylor's army storm the Bishop's Palace and make a powder magazine of the cathedral. The city's heyday was our Prohibition Era, when every American who crossed those one hundred and fifty miles of desert did so with a full pocketbook and a single purpose. Monterrey has not grasped the fact that most of her visitors nowadays come with guidebook in hand. This is but a stopping place on the road to Mexico City. It is the traveler's first stop inside the republic, however, and the keen edge of his anticipation has not been dulled by too many sights. He will never find the Mexico which he is agog to touch, of course. If he ever spies a mantilla, it will be on a debutante of the American Colony in Mexico City and imported from Italy or the Philippines. But better dress a few señoritas in the costumes of operatic Carmens, I say to Monterrey, than try to outdo Greenwich Village. When I see Midwestern bankers, almost starry eyed, gather about a *músico* in front of a Monterrey

hotel, I think how soon my fortune would be made, were I a Mexican singer with a guitar. I should merely give them "La Paloma," which is what they want, not "The St Louis Blues."

Yet all cannot be gross where men and mountains meet, and I suppose I am being unfair to Monterrey. (I read now that the Obispado has been acquired by the city and is to be restored and converted into a museum.) I doubt that anyone looks at the place with the same eyes on the return trip, even if that trip has included only near-by Saltillo.

This city, capital of the state of Coahuila, rests high in a cup of the Sierra Madre Oriental to the southwest of Monterrey, off the Pan American Highway but accessible by road and by the main line of the National Railways of Mexico. Tranquil under her Gothic cliffs, she looks down on the larger and but slightly younger sister who prostituted herself to rangy Texans on a spree. Possibly she envies that sister her bank account. But to me Saltillo is unique in several respects among the sizable cities of Mexico. She keeps hotels and tourist courts and sells sarapes, rainbow-colored blankets, but never does she lose the dignity of a colonial dueña. Her face devoid of color, as one thinks of color in Mexico, even bleak in the steady sunshine, she is nevertheless beautiful.

The beginnings of Saltillo, Monterrey and San Luis Potosí, on the northeast corner of the Mexican pyramid, were those of Chihuahua, Durango and Guadalajara on the northwest corner and of Zacatecas, Aguascalientes and Guanajuato high on the comparatively smooth northern face. All were founded by the Spanish conquerors in the sixteenth century as outposts against the scattered Indian tribes which had been on the periphery of the cultural area whose center was the Aztec capital of Tenochtitlán, now Mexico City. The discovery of mines made boom towns out of them and eventually metropolises and capitals of states in the republic. This wedge-shaped area is *mestizo* Mexico, increasingly white as one approaches the cities, increasingly Indian as one nears the mountains.

Indian. *Mestizo*. White. In these days of so much chest

thumping and shouting in parade-ground voices about race, it seems futile to try to get in a sane word on the subject, even if that word be confined to the problems of Mexico. Paradoxically, consideration of the question there is made more difficult by the fact that, so far as the American tourist is concerned, surface appearances show the question to be settled fair and square and to the greater glory of the Indian. He has been "taken up" enthusiastically, his virtues worried out of him and extolled. The Americans who were so articulate during the Díaz dictatorship thirty years ago still stay with the beer and skittles of the changeless American Colony but are seldom heard from now. Yet I find an individual of this passé type only a little more irksome than the one who puts too much effort into letting the world know that he is free of prejudice. At home he exclaims loudly: "Why, some of my best friends are Jews!" In Mexico he waxes sentimental over every pot in a market place, defective or not, simply because it is Indian. His words do not ring true to an Indian of Oklahoma. I doubt that they do to an Indian of Mexico. The person likely to be most free of prejudice is the one who is unconcernedly silent about race and nationality and creed.

I sat at dinner once in the Hotel Geneve in Mexico City with a party of Californians. My host, the conductor of their tour, had taken them to the market at Toluca that day. One young lady in particular was ecstatic about Indians: their handicrafts, their babies, their politeness, their musical voices, everything. She was studying indigenous art and folk dances and the Aztec language in the summer school of the National University of Mexico. The high light of her day seemed to be the time she had joined ("horned in on," I would have said) a family of Indians at their midday meal. She had sat on a hillside with them and eaten their *tortillas*.

"I hate to think of going back home," she told me over her *filet mignon*. "I'd like to *live* down here, where I could be with Indians all the time. I think it's wonderful—the way they're coming into their own."

And on and on. I should have held my peace, had she not caught me at an inattentive moment with a question like "What's that word I'm trying to think of?"

I said: "You have Indians out in California, don't you?"

She frowned. "Oh, that's different. They're not—well, yes, I guess they are the same race. But——"

The young man who was my host rattled silverware and introduced a new topic of conversation. I was to sign a contract with him after dinner, giving him authority to handle some transportation arrangements for my own party. Later, in his room, he laughed and said to me:

"Miss Blank is quite a card, isn't she? Uh—you understood she was just kidding you, of course. She knew all the time that you're Indian yourself."

Since it is all but humanly impossible to follow trite advice and chuck one's lifelong feelings and beliefs into the Río Grande, the next best course for the Miss Blanks and others would be to think of the terms Indian, *mestizo* and white as psychological rather than racial ones.

The parable of the three brothers has become classic. They are born this time in some north Mexican village, of white father and Indian mother, of Indian father and white mother, of parents both *mestizos*—it makes no difference. One is taken in infancy to Saltillo or, better still, to Monterrey, where he is reared in a "white" family. He hears and speaks only Spanish with, of course, some English on the streets. Provided that he is uninfluenced by reminders of his parentage and that his physical characteristics do not set him apart from his foster brothers and playmates, he thinks of himself as white. So far as society is concerned, he *is* white.

A second brother is removed far from cities, say into those mountains which the highway penetrates below the Tropic of Cancer. The family and community in which he grows up are Indian. His clothing and theirs are Indian: straw sombrero, sandals called *huaraches*, cotton *calzones* and *camisa*, the white pajamalike outfit worn throughout native Mexico. His ways

of life (his culture, that is, in the broader sense of the word) are Indian, many of them harking back to pre-Columbian days. Probably the older members of the family which he regards as his speak only an Indian language, while the younger know Spanish as well. This brother, granted the same opportunities for complete identification with his environment as the one in Monterrey with his, is Indian, *puro indio*.

The third remains in his birthplace, even moves with his family to Saltillo. In either event he is Spanish speaking. In Saltillo he will soon forget the few words of the Indian language which he did know. He wears city clothing. He may visit Monterrey or Mexico City. But he is *mestizo* because *he is aware that he has the blood of two races in his veins*.

In Mexico, as everywhere else, man makes race to a far greater extent than race makes the man. Zapata, the great agrarian leader of the Revolution, was Indian, although he had some white blood. Santa Anna, of Alamo fame, was a white man, even if some of his biographers are correct in stating that his mother was part Indian. The dictator, Porfirio Díaz, was *mestizo*—not only because three quarters or so of his blood was Mixtec but because he tried to whiten his skin with chemicals.

This threefold cultural stratification has its counterpart in the climatic zones—hot, temperate, cold—which are superimposed in Mexico. Leaving Monterrey, the driver leaves the desert and is set an oblique downward course, through the fertile Huajuco Canyon and the orange district of Nuevo León, toward *la tierra caliente*, the Gulf coast where Tampico sweats. He sees demonstrated the principle which has been at work throughout Mexico: that the more accessible a region is, the more thorough has been the mingling of blood and cultures. Proximity to Monterrey, a topography whose natural obstacles are easily circuited by trails and roads, the passage of the Monterrey-Tampico branch of the National Railways—these are factors which have made the country down to the rose gardens of Victoria predominantly *mestizo*.

Victoria, capital of Tamaulipas, is the birthplace of Emilio



Portes Gil, the only civilian among Mexico's last six presidents. Portes Gil doubtless read with interest the account of the fracas in Ciudad Juárez. After deserting pedagogy for the law and becoming a congressman, he was a second at a pistol duel in Chapultepec Park between rival candidates for the governorship of Tamaulipas. The duelers missed each other, but killed one second and wounded Portes Gil.

The end of Victoria's limited sphere of influence is more clear cut a boundary than the Río Grande. When a lady, whose eyesight may possibly have been better than mine, asked me if I had noticed "how much darker the natives get at the Tropic of Cancer," I assured her that I had noted this phenomenon; in fact, my bare forearm, resting on the car door, had begun to take on a deeper tan as we passed a white post into the torrid zone. I have no doubt her observation was figuratively true at least, for here Indian elements in *mestizo* culture must greatly outnumber Spanish, and the influence of Texas is felt no more. There was little exaggeration in my answer, either. Without the reminder of that signpost, the senses tell that the hot lands are near—very near in Galeana Canyon, where green and scarlet parrots screech in the jungle growth that crowds the highway.

For something like one hundred and seventy-five miles whiffs of the lush world by the Gulf come and go, as the pyramid steps lead up, then down to the sugar-cane fields of Villa Juárez; up, then down through palmetto forests to Valles, in the state of San Luis Potosí; still further down, through jungles of ceiba, mahogany and wild fig, the lodging places of Spanish moss and russet and maroon orchids, to the River Axtla, two hundred feet above sea level; up, then down to the Moctezuma River and the straw-thatched town of Tamazunchale, the "Thomas an' Charley" of the tourist; up, breathtakingly, from tropical rain forest into the temperate zone, hung with clouds. . . .

At little Valles, still unadjusted to its fuller life as a town of modern hotels and tourist courts, the highway has parted com-

pany with the railroad and, save for a few coffee plantations, with the world of Monterrey. To say simply that it has entered "Indian Mexico" is to fall into another of those easy generalizations which eventually bring up more questions than they answer. Little scientific study has been made of this Sierra Madre Oriental region opened up by the highway, but the traveler who stops a few times on one day's drive may distinguish at least three separate ethnic groups: the Huastec, south of Valles; the Aztec, intruding into the neighborhood of Tamazunchale; the Otomí, long established beyond Jacala up in the state of Hidalgo. Guidebooks take cognizance of this diversity in cultures by singling out the Huastecs for their taboo against talk between a man and his mother-in-law during the first year of his married life.

The language of these presumably well-regulated households is a Mayan tongue. Seven other languages belonging to this stock, as distinct one from another as Spanish is from Italian, are in use in the southeastern states, where the Yucatecs speak of Mexico as a foreign country. While Otomian contributes only four tongues to Babel, Aztec is one of sixteen languages, each in turn subdivided into dialects, making up the most important stock of Mexico: the Nahuatlan, which belongs to the Shoshonean group spoken by Indians as far north as Montana and Oregon. By the "Mexican language" one usually means Aztec.

And Spanish, the official language? Fully two million inhabitants of Mexico, an eighth of the population, know none at all. At least an equal number use native idioms by preference. Small wonder that there is seldom animated conversation between the motorist who wishes to brush up on his college Spanish and the Indians whom he accosts on the highway! To make matters worse, he is probably employing the Castilian lisp, which may have become fashionable at the Spanish court during the reign of harelipped Charles V but which is heard in Mexico only in the theater.

Too, that lisp may be accentuated by the gum which he is

chewing to relieve the discomfort in his ears as the highway begins the serious business of snaking up the pyramid from Tamazunchale. In fifty-five miles it climbs 5100 feet, through mountains whose green cloaks—successively sweet gums, oaks, evergreens—are all patched by the dark soil of *milpas*, terraced fields of Indian corn. A dip into the valley which holds gleaming white Jacala, a rise to an altitude of 8000 feet, and the pavement sinks through gashes in volcanic rock retaining the color of fire to the old old land of the Otomies.

One who has the green of the world below fresh in his memory may conclude from the abundance of igneous rock that this countryside *was* seared not so long ago by cataclysmic fire. It has that look. It gives off an end-of-summer smell as distinct as the hot lands' scent of spring. Zimapan, the town on the downward slope with the old cobblestone streets, means "Place of Devastation." The change is due to the fact that that last high step on the pyramid has cut off moisture from the Gulf. Trees thin out and give way to desert vegetation: cacti, aloes, yuccas, rows and rows of magueyes.

Mexico honors the nopal cactus upon her flag, but her name she derives from the maguey. From the center of the maguey, as it reaches maturity, springs a hard stalk which, if allowed to grow, attains a height of twenty or thirty feet and bears a striking greenish-yellow flower, *la reina Xochitl*, "the queen flower." Cultivators cut out this flower stalk, leaving a hollow in the heart of the plant to collect the flow of *aguamiel*, "honey water." Fermented, this sap is pulque, to which four hundred (that is, countless) Aztec gods were tutelary.

The Otomies were early known for their garments woven from the fiber of the blue-green leaves, which resemble the cruelest of barbed metal blades. The motorist passes them by scores today, small hardy men and women busily spinning that fiber into balls of thread as they hurry to and from adobe houses shingled with maguey leaves. The smooth unswaying Indian trot is not altered in those who wear, instead of maguey sandals, prized strips of automobile tire. Nor are the tread

marks which these leave in the dust of Mexico incongruous; they look so much like the prints of a snake's scales. On the backs of the women babies ride securely in *ayates* of maguey fiber. From the maguey come many of the products displayed in the markets of the increasingly numerous towns: bags, sashes, hats, baskets, cordage. Over little fires sizzle *gusanos de maguey*, caterpillars which have fattened on the plant's juices. They resemble "cracklin's" and taste better with beer than pretzels or potato chips. Out of low doorways comes the pungent odor which, once sniffed, pricks the nostrils whenever one grows nostalgic for Mexico.

*Don't you know pulque  
Is liquor divine?  
Angels in heaven  
Prefer it to wine.*

The maguey is indigenous to Mexico. Two other features of this Hidalgo landscape—grim, ominous, stone—are not: the fortresses of the hacienda and of the church. They bear evidence how early land seeker and friar marched hand in hand out from the capital until the law of diminishing returns halted the one; the flagging of missionary zeal, the other.

Another alien note, despite its gesture at conformity, is the Monument of Friendly Relations, erected by the American Colony of Mexico City at kilometer 90, the topmost point on the highway.

In the distance on a clear day one can make out white clouds banked in the sky. They cannot be—yet are—the snows of The Mountain That Smokes and his sleeping mate, The White Woman.

"Traveler," says the Mexican poet, Alfonso Reyes, opening his *Visión de Anahuac*; "you have come to the place where the air is the most transparent . . ."

And then—the hitchhiker.

Mexico simply cannot do commonplace things without verve. By that monument of the mighty organ cactus, a man

in overalls stepped from a group onto the highway and flagged us down with a square of red cloth. He was smiling in a way Mexicans have that makes you uncertain whether to smile back in pure friendliness or to sharpen your wits to find out what the joke is. Indicating a kindly faced but far from worried-looking old man who had followed him, he explained in English that this was a road worker who had just received word of the illness of his daughter. Would we let him ride with us into Mexico?

(If I keep referring incorrectly to Mexico City, it is in order to avoid confusion with state and nation. Mexicans never add the word city to the name of their capital, as they do in the case of Ciudad Juárez, for instance. Outside the country they may speak of Mexico, D. F.—*Distrito Federal*.)

We agreed to take the father as far as Venta del Carpio, where we were turning off to visit the pyramids of San Juan Teotihuacán before sunset. As he climbed into the rear seat we saw that two more men had come forward. The spokesman presented them as brothers of the sick girl, who wanted to ride with their parent. We looked up at the Monument of Friendly Relations and acquiesced. We looked ahead on the highway, saw more red flags and happened to think that this would be quitting time. Another workman was hastening toward us. An uncle of the little sick one. *Un momentito . . .*

We drove on, leaving to the next of our countrymen who should pass the responsibility for carrying on friendly relations. If we went into Monterrey amid yellow butterflies as thick as ticker tape raining from the windows of Broadway upon a parade, we covered the next to the last lap of the Pan American Highway to the waving of a galaxy of red flags. There were cheers, whether for us or for our slyly amused passengers, I am not sure. I think, however, that I turned my head once almost in time to catch the old man bowing right and left like a grandee.

The incident may have a point. As we unloaded our friends at the crossroads in Venta del Carpio, with handshakes and

speeches all around, I noticed other cars with United States license plates going by at great speed. I caught glimpses of startled faces turned in our direction. In Mexico City the next morning I was hailed by a gentleman who had had a great deal to say, in the Valles hotel where we both stayed, about the recent expropriation of oil properties.

"Glad to see you got through all right," he said. "I passed yesterday while you were being held up by those Communist agitators. Wondered afterward if I oughtn't to have stopped. I just mailed a letter to the newspaper up home. Thought people ought to know about that demonstration against Americans. We come down here, spend our money, help put this country on its feet . . ."

## CHAPTER II

# Feathered Serpent

IN MEXICO it is easier to squelch lottery ticket salesmen than amateur archaeologists. The former go down under a frosty eye and a curt no. The latter will be the manager of your hotel, the desk clerk and the charming young man who attends to your sight-seeing:

"Wearing low-heeled shoes today? Good. You have quite a climb ahead of you at San Juan Teotihuacán. The Pyramid of the Sun is two hundred and sixteen feet high. The Pyramid of the Moon, one hundred and fifty. Lower than the great Egyptian pyramids they were copied after, but——"

One member of every party, its bane, has read books. She speaks up now (and as long as she is no charge of mine I feel like egging her on, because she is usually right):

"You don't mean to say that you accept G. Elliot Smith's heliolithic theory?"

"Beg pardon? Oh. Well, I have a theory of my own."

"Egyptian pyramids were built of stone; Mexican pyramids, of sun-dried bricks. Egyptian pyramids were designed as tombs; Mexican pyramids, as bases for temples."

"But Mexicans got the principle from Egypt."

"Then why didn't they get the principle of the wheel while they were at it?"

"The wheel? Oh, they must have forgotten that. But I was

about to tell you of a discovery I made a few years ago. I took measurements of the Pyramid of the Sun and compared them with those of the Pyramid of Cheops. I found a hidden significance . . .”

Present a letter of introduction to a resident of Mexico, and the chances are that before the subject of your mutual friend has been exhausted he is holding forth on Lost Atlantis, whose inhabitants must have taken refuge in Mexico since the legend of a universal flood is an old one there and the Aztec word for “water” is *atl*. *Atl*—Atlantis. See?

The scholarly looking gentleman standing at your elbow in the National Museum will tell you without urging that Mexico was peopled from Chinese junks blown across the Pacific. He will point to the oriental features of images and inform you that the Otomian language sounds like Chinese.

Prowl about curio shops and you fall prey to bespectacled ancients in black alpaca who bring clay tablets out of cases. Although it is always too dark for you to see plainly they are able to translate hieroglyphics proving the first Mexicans to have been the lost tribes of Israel. The Aztecs had a goddess, Cihuacoatl, who pounded up bones from the nether world and made the first pair of humans out of the paste. *Cihua* means “woman,” *coatl* means “snake,” Mother Eve, of course.

Occasionally the tables are turned on Atlantis, Asia and Egypt by some enthusiast who makes them borrow their civilizations from Mexico, cradle of the human race. A talking point is the established fact that, of the two nations credited with invention of zero signs, the Maya made theirs centuries ahead of the Hindus.

One can laugh all this off. What is just as ludicrous, yet not to be laughed off, is the discovery of Nordics bearing swastikas in Mexican prehistory. In Mexico and in the Central American and Andean republics, all Spanish-speaking countries the mass of whose population is of Indian blood, the great obstacle to the diffusion of Nazi ideologies is the Nazi racial doc-



trine. So in 1935 Dr Krum Heller wrote from Berlin to Nicolás Rodríguez, leader of the Fascist Gold Shirts:

"I come to the conclusion that the Mexicans and Germans are the same race, Nordics all, not only because the Spaniards were Goths, but because the Toltecs were immigrants from the North, as were the primitive Germans, and although the first Aztec Indians were blue eyed and blond haired, like the Goths, the migration of the Moors to Spain and the mixture with them brought about a dark skin. Serious studies by ethnologists of first rank prove the racial equality of the Mexicans and Nordics, and this can be shown today even by blood tests."

The growth of Dr Heller's brain child was retarded when the German Pro-Culture League published copies of a Nazi party official letter, ordering a German dismissed from the party because of his marriage with "a person of a second-class race, a Mexican." The anti-Semitic, anti-Communist Gold Shirts, who had headquarters in Monterrey and who received backing from wealthy supporters of Plutarco Elías Calles, have been outlawed by the administration of Lázaro Cárdenas; but they have successors and Dr Heller's gutturals still cross the Atlantic in special broadcasts to Mexico.

Mexico's past does hold many bona-fide mysteries, but regarding the racial and cultural antecedents of its Indians anthropologists of first and of second rank are in essential agreement.

Of the three great primary races of mankind—the Mongoloid, Caucasian and Negroid—the first comprises the Mongolian proper of Eastern Asia, the Malaysian of the East Indies and the American Indian. The latter came from Asia, although he and the Chinese and Japanese are linked no more closely than are Arabs, Belgians, Catalans, Danes, English, French, Germans, Hindus, Italians and Jews by their inclusion in the Caucasian race.

The Indian came by way of Bering Strait, possibly by the

Aleutian chain as well, on the ice or in boats, not in one concerted migration but in small bands through centuries. Scientists formerly estimated that this movement began about ten thousand years ago. Recent discoveries would seem to push the date back five or ten thousand years. The time is fixed, however, as the end of the Old Stone Age or the beginning of the New. Had the immigrants arrived much later, they would have brought some of the domesticated animals and plants—cattle, pigs, sheep, wheat, barley, rice, millet—of which America knew nothing until the coming of the Spaniards, who owed them all to the East.

Although there was a diversity of cultures and physical types among these first families of America, they had in common a brownish skin, a broad face, straight black hair on the head, little hair on the face and body. They wore skins and lived by hunting and fishing, by gathering roots and berries. Bow and arrow, harpoon, fire drill, basketry, half-wild dogs—they had little other equipment, if they had all this, with which to cut themselves off from the Asiatic homeland. Yet in the sixteenth century A.D. Spain, with horses, gunpowder and religion given her by Asia, wrecked civilizations but little less advanced than her own. A. L. Kroeber puts them from four to five thousand years behind. Philip Ainsworth Means holds that "the American civilizations in the middle of the fifteenth century were hardly inferior to that of Europe in the middle of the thirteenth." The important point is that Indians accomplished what they did in Mexico and Peru independently of the rest of the world.

There is as much opportunity to exercise the fancy in accompanying these Americans on their wanderings over the fifteen thousand miles of virgin hunting ground which stretched before them as in weaving pipe dreams about civilizations being transported on magic carpets across thousands of miles of open water to a people idly awaiting them in Mexico. The immigrants would spread out fanwise from the Strait, in families and groups of families, and slowly work

down toward the sun. As bands lost touch with those in front and behind, peculiarities of custom and speech would become more distinct. One prolific family might so impress its physical characteristics upon a group that in the course of generations this would widen into a subracial variety. Environment would have its effect.

Gradually Middle America comes into being. That long thin area which coils from Mexico through Central America and along the coasts and mountains of Colombia, Ecuador, Peru and Bolivia begins to lift itself above the cultural level of the rest of the hemisphere, exactly as a pyramid rises out of a plain, although made of the clay of that plain. And the power that



pushes up a pyramid, layer by layer, was pushing up Middle America. Man was gathering there and, prompted both from without himself and from within, was learning to co-ordinate his efforts and to build toward the sun.

The pyramid was rising to a peak in southern Mexico because, as Mr J. Eric Thompson points out, there is no reason to believe that the American of ten thousand years ago had different tastes in climate from today's tired businessman. If Mexico is the ideal summer and winter resort now, it was then. Tourists came a-vagabonding into Mexico. They were so pleased with what they found that they did what tourists still want to do: they settled down. They traded back and



forth—food, clothing, ornaments, inventions and discoveries which they or their fathers had made during their wanderings. They came to understand languages of other stocks as well as ones which they failed to recognize as dialects of their own. Groups began to fuse. Communities were in the making.

But after attaining a certain height every pyramid has within it its own destruction. Unless reinforced by stone, it collapses. South Mexico was threatened with overpopulation. There were rumblings, like those of Popocatepetl when he is getting ready to spew, and the first American experiment in civilization building commenced to slip.

In the nick of time nature came to man's aid—or man went to nature. We shall never have the story behind the cultivation of a wild grass whose seeds were much sought after for food upon the Mexican plateau. Probably some Burbank noticed that seeds spilled from a basket had sprouted, thus hitting on the idea of planting in order to ensure a steady food supply. In the prehistory of the New World there was no day more momentous than the unrecorded one, perhaps four thousand years before Christ, when a man saw green stalks breaking through the soil into which he had thrust seed. He had given a continent agriculture. He had given Mexicans the food which, with subsidiary beans and squash, has been their staff of life from that day to this: maize.

*Teocentli*, the Aztecs called it when, thousands of years later, they came to share in its bounty. "Divine maize." The epithet is deserved. If Mexico built high in the realms of art and science it was on the leisure afforded her by maize. If she has survived all the drubbings that fate could administer it has been on the strength given her by maize.

Maize cookery has not changed in the last four hundred years. It would be as important to know whether its main forms had their inception four thousand years ago as to be able to list the tribes that settled in Mexico then, the languages they spoke and the wars they fought. *Nixtamal* is the basis of all: the dough into which maize kernels are ground after

being boiled in lime water. *Nixtamal* is patted out between the palms and baked on a clay griddle—scorched in the lumpy spots—to make the thin pancake called the *tortilla*. To *nixtamal* fat is added, meat and a flavoring of chilies, red or green peppers. The whole is wrapped in a corn husk and, boiled, gives the *tamal*, such elaborate fare that it must be reserved for fiestas. *Nixtamal* is stirred in water, strained, and the resultant gruel drunk as *atole*.

A taste for *tortillas* is slow in coming to most visitors from the United States, who find them unpalatable without salt. Yet there's a flavor there for which a man may develop a craving like that for alcohol or nicotine. It is not the taste of the corn alone, but also that of the lime which impregnates it. The stone of the *metate* on which the *nixtamal* was ground adds something, as does the clay of the *comal* on which it was baked, the smoke of wood or charcoal.

*Tortillas* are the "bread" of the early Mexican poet, thought by his translator, John Hubert Cornyn, to have been Nezahualcoyotl, fifteenth-century ruler of Texcoco:

*Oh, my mother, when I die  
Bury me beneath your hearth.  
When you go to make the bread  
There is where you'll cry for me.*

*And if anyone should ask you:  
"Noble lady, wherefore weep you?"  
You will answer: "Green the wood is,  
Much it smokes and makes me cry."*

South of Mexico City is the Pedregal, a crust of black basaltic lava, from five to thirty feet deep, poured out by one of the near-by volcanoes, Ajusco or Xitli. The surface has the appearance of a muddy sea suddenly petrified at the height of a storm. A hush might have fallen by enchantment then and still lie upon this place of legendary terrors. Throughout history men have fled from justice and from persecution to its

caves, formed by the bursting of huge bubbles in the cooling lava. The spirits of some, it is said, have never left. They come out at nightfall and make scrabbling sounds along the devious secret trails. (How many generations of bare and sandaled feet would be required to wear a path a foot deep in hardened lava?) Jack-o'-lanterns glow among the cacti and pepper trees that sustain themselves on what soil the wind sweeps in.

One spring night a number of years ago one of these eerie lights was reported to have danced madly over a high island of earth in the Pedregal which the inhabitants of the near-by village of San Fernando had just learned might not be the natural hill they had always thought. An *americano* had put laborers to digging there, explaining that he believed Cuicuilco, "Place of Creeping," to be a mound built by *los antiguos* and partially covered by lava. San Fernando saw through him as soon as it heard about that dancing light. There were old stories of a chieftain who had held the Pedregal against the Aztecs. His followers had buried him in its heart, together with his treasure of gold and silver, and over him they had heaped a great mound. On many a morning thereafter, says Professor Byron Cummings of the University of Arizona, the men furnished him by the Mexican government found evidence of frantic nocturnal spadework.

San Fernando was disappointed as excavation progressed. Not so archaeologists. An ancestor of Mexico's pyramids had been revealed: a terraced cone of earth fifty-two feet high, faced with chunks of lava from some earlier eruption. Moreover the find had been made under circumstances which permitted scientists to give it at least a minimum age without any of the usual reservations. According to geologists, that last lava crept over the plain, mounting almost halfway up the sides of the pyramid, two thousand years ago or more. But Cuicuilco was old then, an archaeological ruin. Part of the retaining wall of its final addition had fallen and been covered fifteen feet deep with wind-blown dust. Tunnels

driven under the lava on the other side of the Pedregal penetrated no Pompeii buried alive, but a cemetery.

An hour spent on Cuicuilco, from which may be seen the terraces of at least two other mounds not yet explored, is a salutary experience for one who thinks of America as young. Then, after growing as woozy headed as if he were trying to keep track of the shuttling of time in a J. B. Priestley play, he may circle the Pedregal and be treated to a "cauld grue" at the back door of bougainvillea-draped San Ángel, officially renamed Villa Obregón in honor of the one-armed general who was assassinated there.

The tunnels are electrically lighted now and no John Dickson Carr could conjure up a more macabre effect than that of the yellow glare of those anachronistic bulbs on so much cold dust. Sealed in glass cases, as they were found sealed in lava, are skeletons with carefully flexed limbs, surrounded by the treasures which accompanied them to the grave. No gold or silver here, for Mexico had to learn from the Spaniards that these possessed intrinsic value, but pottery once full of maize for the long journey, clay figurines and idols of the fire god, whom the Aztecs were to call Huehueteotl, "the old old god." All show how busy was the artist in Cuicuilco man, unconsciously the caricaturist as well, and how far beyond the groping stage he had gone.

Unimportant—but somewhere about those rocks is always the same shaved-headed child, looking like a Maya glyph. *Pobrecito*, I see it year after year: sexless, I'd swear, and ageless, sealed by something more terrible than hardening lava. It tries to tell me something and I can't understand. . . .

Nor can Mexicans understand why tourists come out into the sunlight wrinkling their noses. A tourist turned resident took her Indian cook to see the exhibits in the prehistoric cemetery. The Indian was unresponsive until she spied a particular grinding stone. That brought a delighted cry from her. She wanted to handle it; she begged her mistress to buy it



for use in her kitchen. "The very *metate* I have been looking for! If I had it I could make such beautiful little *tortillas*."

The lava has yielded enough such artifacts for archaeologists to agree that the tag, "archaic," given to this civilization which flourished on the Mexican and Central American plateaus is descriptive only when one sets it against those which followed. Apparently its direct beneficiaries were the Tarascans of the west, whose capital on the shores of jade-green Lake Pátzcuaro had one of the most beautiful names in Mexico: Tzintzuntzan—the sound of the hummingbird's wings. Any Tarascan fisherman or farmer will tell you today that the Aztecs are parvenus in Mexico.

Were the Huastecs not so browbeaten, they might make the same assertion. This Mayan-speaking tribe, met on the Pan American Highway below Valles, extends down the Pánuco River to Tampico and southward along the Gulf. Excavation in the Pánuco valley has brought to light remains almost identical with those of Cuicuilco. Yet this maize civilization is usually identified with the plateau, not *tierra caliente*.

And the Maya . . .

"Suddenly in the forests of Chiapas, Tabasco, Campeche, in Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador and the peninsula of Yucatán, there are the Maya!"

These intellectual aristocrats of America do merit Waldo Frank's dramatic introduction, without pother about background or lineage. But they can scarcely have sprung, as the Zapotecs of Oaxaca boasted of themselves, from rocks and trees. South of the Huastecs in the state of Vera Cruz lives another people of Mayan speech, the Totonacs. One has to travel around the curve of the Gulf for nearly five hundred miles before he comes upon another, the Chontales. But in that non-Maya gap at Tuxtla, Vera Cruz, has been found a greenstone statuette recording the earliest Maya date ever deciphered. It corresponds to 100 B.C. in our chronology.

Assisting an archaeologist in the field is as dull a job, nine cases out of ten, as accompanying a police officer in his routine

investigation of a crime. Listening to an archaeologist draw conclusions from his finds is every whit as exciting as following a detective's unraveling of a plot in the last pages of a mystery novel. Seldom can either present an airtight case. Usually the culprit obliges the sleuth with a confession. Perhaps some Mexican child (one of those blond young 'uns at Tuxpan, let's say, whose great-grandpappy bolted to Mexico after Appomattox and until his death continued to speak of the "Confederate States of America") today is playing with a statuette which would support this reconstruction of events by Dr Thomas Gann of the British Museum:

Some time in the first millennium B.C. a band of archaic people packed a supply of maize and left their homes on the plateau in search of a frontier. If that is not sufficient motive for any Americans, old or new, we may later find a parallel in the wanderings of the Aztecs. As the first immigrants had done, they moved down to a warmer climate and settled in or near the Valley of the Pánuco, perhaps bringing the cultivation of maize to a people already established there. After a time they moved on south, leaving some of their number behind, to fend for themselves as Huastecs.

Their long trek in search of a permanent home was marked by frequent halts, to see what promises each region held out, to clear the virgin forest (with stone axes, they had no metal), to plant, harvest and store up enough maize for the next stage. The seasons would regulate each move, so the Maya studied the seasons.

In the years they must have spent north of the present city of Jalapa they progressed swiftly in the fields in which they were to excel: sculpture, architecture, astronomy, calendrical reckoning. When the main body migrated again those who remained to become Totonacs had the wherewithal to develop a most striking architecture, which would attract more attention now were its best examples at El Tajín and Yohualinchan not jungle-bound. In the National Museum in Mexico City is a reproduction of the former, known as the Pyramid of

Papantla, carved in wood. With its seven setbacks (a general Maya characteristic), each divided into niches (a local development), it would easily pass as the model for a twentieth-century skyscraper.

When we learn from archaeologists that this Thunderbolt Pyramid shows every indication of having been laid to the design of no volcanic mountain but to that of the stars in their courses, with a niche for each day of the year, it is not surprising to find proof that by 100 B.C., when they sojourned in Tuxtla, the parent Maya had worked out their intricate calendar.

This is regarded as one of the greatest, if not the greatest achievement in pure reasoned science of any people on their cultural level. The Maya had no scientific instruments, as in the building of their cities they lacked draft animals and a knowledge of the true arch.

The calendar consisted of two concurrent counts. The first, called *tonalamatl* by the Aztecs when they adopted it, coupled twenty day names with the numbers one to thirteen. Both sequences repeated themselves in unchanging order, like so many figures in a slot machine. The lowest common multiple of thirteen and twenty being 260, the beginning day sign and the number one would not coincide again for 260 days, which made up the sacred year. Sacred, as calling men's attention to the dates of religious ceremonies, but since almost every task connected with agriculture was accompanied by some rites the *tonalamatl* might well be termed a farmer's almanac.

The second count was the year of 365 days, consisting of eighteen named months of twenty numbered days each, plus five leap days. This was a fraction short of the true year, the Maya knew. While they did not interpolate any leap years, they did compute the needed correction at twenty-five days in 104 years—greater accuracy than was attained by any calendar until the Gregorian.

With these two counts running concurrently, as day names

and month numbers were running in one and day numbers and month names in the other, the beginning of the 260-day year and that of the 365-day year would coincide every fifty-two years. This gave the "calendar round," by which the Maya dated. For long periods of time they reckoned in katuns of twenty years, in baktuns of twenty katuns, in cycles of twenty baktuns. They figured out a double fifty-two-year cycle corresponding with sixty-five years on the planet Venus. They brought the revolutions of the moon into accord with their day count.

"Work of the devil!" cried the Spanish Bishop Landa and made a bonfire of every Maya book he could lay hands on.

Fortunately, over a period of fifteen centuries the benighted Maya had erected stone monoliths every twenty years, in large cities every ten or five. Fortunately, the United States shares with modern Mexico (and ancient) a liking for chewing gum. Word of many a stele buried in jungle fastnesses has reached archaeologists through gatherers of chicle. On each is sculptured a date, which scientists usually can read, and hieroglyphs which they cannot, but which must record the principal events of the period whose end was commemorated.

On June 16, 68 A.D. (a week after Nero committed suicide in Rome) a stele was erected, "unveiled" might be better, at Uaxactun, in the north of what is now Guatemala. As this date contains an odd number of days and months it probably marks the founding of the first city in the new land. Others went up like mushrooms. Tikal, the largest, famous for its wood carving. Copan in Honduras, one of whose fine sculptures depicts a gathering of absorbed-looking priestly gentlemen on September 2, 503 A.D.—unless experts are greatly mistaken, the world's first astronomical conference. Walled Tulum on the east coast of Yucatán. Pusilha and Lubaantun in British Honduras, specializing respectively in porcelainlike painted pottery and in clay figurines. Palenque in Chiapas, the southernmost Mexican state, the artistic center of the

"Old Empire" and the most accessible of its sites today. Quirigua in Guatemala, known for the size and beauty of its steles and altars. Chichen Itzá, in northern Yucatán.

Then one of the knottiest mysteries of Mexico. Between 530 and 629 A.D. the population of these southern cities moved *en masse* to Yucatán. They went a city at a time, suddenly, as if struck at by something outside their experience. National decadence, epidemic disease, earthquakes, civil war or invasion, climatic changes, exhaustion of the soil, religious or superstitious reasons—all sorts of theories have been advanced and disputed. It is much as if Californians were to desert Sacramento, San Francisco, Hollywood, Los Angeles, San Diego and move—lock, stock and barrel—to the far end of Lower California, for no reason discoverable by the historian of thirteen centuries hence.

Yucatán is flat, a limestone crust topped by low tangled jungle. That crust must be broken to get at water, except in summer, when tropical rains flood it but soon seep down into subterranean rivers and pools, *cenotes*. A more unsuitable place for the growing of maize would be hard to find, and conditions cannot have been much different when the Maya made Yucatán the seat of their "New Empire." Yet they flourished. Their art underwent a renaissance, shed some of its classic constraint as if a younger generation, bursting with energy, had taken over. They built those cities which, in ruin and reconstruction, make the visitor from modern Mérida blink: the new Chichen Itzá, Mayapan, Uxmal.

Meanwhile there was comparable activity elsewhere in Mexico. In southern Oaxaca, where the Sierra Madre divides into eastern and western ranges, the Zapotecs had built their capital on the heights of Monte Albán and probably had contributed to the development of the Mayan cities. The Toltecs had appeared at Teotihuacán and were shaking the plateau with their pyramid construction. Toltec means "builder" and is the only name by which we know these rivals of the Maya. We cannot be sure whether they spoke a Nahuatlan

language or an Otomian. For all they built so substantially, they are one of the most shadowy peoples of Mexico. Part of their culture may have been shaped by Maya influence, transmitted to them by the early inhabitants of the Zapotec country, but there was reciprocation—of blows at least. In their former home the Maya had been a peaceful nation, only two sculptures of that period having been discovered which suggest warfare. But in Yucatán warriors crowd priests on stone, and in the thirteenth century a hitherto minor motif comes into prominence: a snake with a ruff of feathers, symbol of Kukulcan.

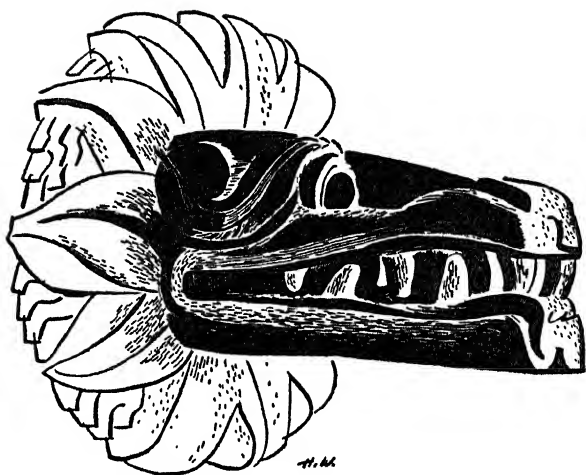
Kukulcan—"Serpent with Quetzal Feathers." So highly prized were the three or four long green tail feathers of this bird of the trogon family which inhabits a mountainous area on the Guatemalan-Mexican border that *quetzal* became synonymous with beauty and rarity. The "Precious Beautiful Serpent," then, was a vaguely defined elemental god, associated with the movement of the wind, with the rain which the wind brings, with the life which the rain brings. He first stirred in the dawn wind at the hour of waking and stretching, and the cool fugitive beauty of the planet Venus as morning star was his. Our phrase, "the breath of life," with all its connotations, probably comes close to expressing the concept which Mexico had of him.

But on the backwash of the Maya cultural wave that broke about the Toltecs a man (maybe only the fame of a man) reached Yucatán, where he was given the name Kukulcan and, doubtless as the god's high priest, invested with his attributes. Legend makes him a Toltec ruler who was brought to Chichen Itzá as a prisoner of war but who escaped death and became sovereign of the city. He is credited with the founding of Mayapan, which he made the civil capital of a unified state, leaving Chichen Itzá the religious center. He imported mercenaries from Mexico to keep the peace and with them new styles in architecture and the game, *tlaxtli*, which differed from modern basketball in that the ball, a rubber one, had

to be knocked through a ring with the hips or knees. Finally Kukulcan left Yucatán. Word drifted back that he had conquered Tabasco with the aid of twenty followers. That was all.

Stories of him grew, however, while in the two centuries of peace that followed his departure Chichen Itzá, Mayapan and Uxmal formed the great League of Mayapan. When the league broke up, plunging the peninsula into the civil strife which resulted in the destruction of Mayapan in 1451, that last period of tranquillity became all the more memorable: the Golden Age of Kukulcan.

Stories of him burgeoned everywhere. His people, the Toltecs, had been swamped under hordes of more virile tribes from the north—Chichimecs, "Barbarians"—but as they scattered they carried the cult of him, under the name of Quetzalcoatl, their equivalent of Kukulcan. His image aroused intense curiosity among the Toltecs' polytheistic new neighbors. His face was always kept covered, some said because he was ugly, but the Toltecs let it be known that he had a long yellow beard.



## CHAPTER III

# The Highway of the Roses

OTHER nations stumbled upon Anáhuac, the Aztecs said. They were divinely sent.

Their tribal god was a god of war and so of the sun, which gets its flush from drinking the product of war. Mexitli, he was called, "He Who Comes Out of the Maguey," or Huitzilopochtli, "Hummingbird on the Left Side," from the iridescent feathers which he wore on his left foot. In their traditions is a circumstantial account of how he bade them leave some reedy northern lake, Aztlan, to find the home and seat of empire which he had chosen for them on a similar lake nearer the sun. When they reached their destination he would give them a sign: an eagle perched upon a nopal cactus, devouring a snake.



Eight related tribes started with them, the last wave of an inundation of Nahuatl-speaking peoples that had been pouring out of the north as the Germanic barbarians poured upon Rome. Through his priests, however, Huitzilopochtli expressed displeasure at these hangers-on who worshiped other gods, so dutifully the Aztecs shook them off and continued alone, a chosen people.

Aztlan has been located in Canada, California, up and down the Rockies. While it is too nebulous a place ever to be identified with certainty, there is reason to believe that the Aztecs crossed the Colorado and Gila rivers and the deserts of Chihuahua to Culiacán in the present state of Sinaloa. Thereafter their march must have corresponded to the line of the Southern Pacific Railway along the coast. This is a difficult route at best, obstructed by deep gorges, swift streams, sudden oceanward thrusts of the mountains, a route that makes a nine days' hero out of the motorist who negotiates it now. The Aztecs may have spent almost a thousand years in reaching the domain of the Tarascans in Jalisco and Michoacán.

This is Mexico's lake country and, looking at those postcard settings today, one can understand with what certainty the Aztecs hailed this as the promised land. They must have come on broad Chapala first, and if it is true that some Toltecs had settled this far west they may have heard of Quetzalcoatl in the place where D. H. Lawrence was to write his novel, *The Plumed Serpent*. We know they paused on Pátzcuaro but Huitzilopochtli withheld his sign and they moved on, with a sharp turn to the northeast. (The priests had sized up the Tarascans accurately as fighting men not to be easily dispossessed. The Aztecs never did succeed in conquering Michoacán.)

This eternal search was growing disheartening, however. More and more of the scanty band were detaching themselves and, eagle or no eagle, settling down in likely spots. Huitzilopochtli was losing prestige. When threats of his vengeance

could not budge a group from a lake near Tollan, "Place of Reeds," the time came for fulfillment. No white-livered Maya these priests, to lift their eyes to contemplation of infinity while the wonderment of stars and growing maize fired the brain. The Aztec camp is shaken by midnight thunder. It wakes at sunrise to find the would-be seceders stretched upon the ground, their breasts cut open and their hearts torn out.

Huitzilopochtli has tasted blood—for the first time, tradition would have us believe. His people turn their faces to the south, exalted at this manifestation of his presence. They move faster, abandoning the sick and old, beating down what opposition lies in their path rather than side-stepping it as in Michoacán. Huitzilopochtli remembers.

In the codex room of the National Museum is preserved a strip of deerskin on which an artist of a later day painted the story of the Aztec migration. In this *Tira de la Peregrinación* the bodies of the sacrificial victims are spread before a maguey. There may be a hint here as to the beginnings of human sacrifice with this particular nation.

The institution has not been a custom of the backward peoples of the earth but of those who, like the Aztecs, were being polished by civilization. In the New World it was practically nonexistent outside Middle America. Here the preliminary steps were doubtless the same as in the early cultural centers of the Old World. Men made offerings to a deity: in this case corn meal, tobacco, beautiful feathers, the equivalent of money. Then their own blood, which combined the idea of self-inflicted pain as penance. With the Aztecs maguey thorns, "the magic thorns of warfare," were symbols of the function of Huitzilopochtli-Mexitli. Before battle they were used to draw blood offerings from the limbs, ears and tongue. The flower stalk that rises from the maguey was the symbol of the god himself. The act of tearing out that stalk is full of suggestion, as anyone will agree who has watched

sap well into the cavity. And, except for the dog, Mexico had no domesticated animals.

Whatever its origin, sacrifice by the peculiar method of extracting the heart was an integral part of Aztec religion by the time they came to a mountain-rimmed lake, fed by streams from the snow-capped volcanoes, which must have quieted all regret for those cameo lakes of the west that they had had to forego. The valley floor has been drained now, but late on an afternoon toward the end of a summer of heavy rains one may pause on the Puebla Highway as it dips from the east and, granted a sunset, have the illusion of looking at the spectacle of that lake as the Aztecs first saw it. Restored and burnished by the sun, the waters of Texcoco on the right and those of Chalco and Xochimilco on the left flow almost together, making islands out of hills and leaving only a causeway for the road to cross. Descending, one finds beyond a stranded stone dike nothing but marshes with a malarial look. In the winter the gritty dust that sometimes gets into your eyes on the streets of Mexico City is from those old lake beds. Texcoco dust, blowing through Mexico.

While the natural beauties of the place did not leave the Aztecs unmoved, their immediate concern was the fact that the choice spots along the shores were already occupied. Atzacapotzalco, on the west, was one of the most powerful cities. Shortly after this, its ruler imposed an unusual tribute upon the people of Xochimilco: "grown willow and juniper trees for planting in his capital" and "a raft on top of which they were to plant all native vegetables and then bring it by water to Atzacapotzalco." They contrived to deliver "not only the trees, but the floating raft garden full of the nourishing food plants and flowers."

Even communities of Nahuas were not disposed to welcome these tardy cousins of theirs who still wore skins instead of decent cotton and maguey clothing. The Aztecs put in years edging about the water, feeling their muscles, before they took possession of a hill on the west shore: Chapultepec,

"Grasshopper Hill." Their neighbors promptly banded together and ousted them. They were enslaved, herded upon a barren rattlesnake-infested reservation, driven beyond the pale, because of aversion, it seems, to the sacrifices with which they kept trying to propitiate Huitzilopochtli. But they refused to leave the vicinity and at last, in the year 1325 A.D. . . .

Two priests wade out into a marsh from a part of the shore which the Atzcapotzalcons, to whom it belongs, have not thought worth occupying. One returns, bearing news that on a rock projecting from the water he and his companion have seen a nopal cactus and on the nopal an eagle making a meal of a snake. Furthermore, Huitzilopochtli has spoken to them: "Behold the sign I promised you. I commanded you to throw the heart of one of my enemies into the reeds of this lake. You obeyed. Now you may know that that heart fell upon this rock and from it sprang this nopal for the eagle to light on. The city which you are to build here is to be named Tenochtitlán, 'By the Divine Nopal.'"

At the conclusion of this speech the second priest was pulled beneath the water. Next day he appears, telling how he sank to the dim realm of Tlaloc, head of the rain gods, whom the Aztecs always acknowledged as having the oldest and best claim to reverence in Mexico. By Tlaloc ("The Earth's Pulque," i.e., water) stood four jars, his to dispense as he saw fit. One held the good rain upon which even the maguey of war was dependent; the second, rain that produced mildew and rust; the third, hail and sleet; the fourth, rain that kept crops from drying and maturing. Tlaloc was kindly disposed toward men and gave them the benefit of the first jar—so long as he had his libations of children's tears.

"Welcome to my beloved son, Huitzilopochtli, and his people," croaked ancient Tlaloc. "Tell the Mexicans that this is where they are to live and make the seat of their empire. Here they and their descendants will wax great."

So, where the Cathedral of Mexico City now stands, the

Aztecs set to work, first of all, on a home for the image which they had carried so far. It was a makeshift one, a mound of reeds and rushes and mud on piles driven into the water, but on it a hut sheltered an altar, and as soon as his image was in place Huitzilopochtli established a precedent by demanding a sacrifice. A war party brought him one.

Then under the noses of the Atzcapotzalcons, to whom they were paying tribute, the Aztecs began filling in the marsh and erecting homes for themselves. On market days they would go in disguise to the cities about the lake, bartering fish, water fowl and frogs for stone, lime and wood. Before long they opened up a quarry of *tezontle*, the porous amygdaloid which still gives old walls in Mexico City the color of seared flesh.

As their dwellings improved, the *teocalli*, "god house," was improved, always with appropriate sacrifices delivered by war parties which had gone out *for that single purpose*.

But if Huitzilopochtli was an exacting god, he was never a jealous one. As the Aztecs won a measure of acceptance from the bickering city states of Anáhuac, he gave hospitality to other deities. Besides Tlaloc, who had a shrine on Huitzilopochtli's own pyramid, there crowded in all the other agricultural gods that had been worshiped by the sedentary maize-growing population of the valley before the Chichimecs came. Then there were the gods brought by these latter; gods peculiar to one tribe and gods revered by all in common. Omnipotent among Nahuatl deities was Tezcatlipoca, the invisible ubiquitous master of life and death, who held before his face the moon disk, in representation an obsidian mirror, so that he might see all that happened in the world. In time under the ascendancy of Tezcatlipoca, Aztec state religion moved toward monotheism, although as war parties became armies gods kept journeying to Tenochtitlán from far corners of Mexico. From Oaxaca, for instance, came Xipe Totec, probably the tutelary deity of Monte Albán. He was patron of goldwork and of the yellow corn, and in his honor once

a year men were "husked"—flayed. Of course each required human sacrifice. Since these were Mexican gods, they weren't ones to bestow favors with no return. They gave man life, sun and rain and sprouting corn; it was up to him to pay back a little in kind.

A place was even made for the circular shrine of the one god who frowned on human sacrifice: Quetzalcoatl.

I think Quetzalcoatl always represented as big a question mark to the Aztecs as he does to us now. To begin with, the people with whom he was identified, although negligible in military affairs, aroused something akin to awe as the Aztecs came into contact with their communities at Atzacapotzalco and Texcoco and later at Cholula, beyond the valley, where they maintained a *teocalli* greater than any ever built for Huitzilopochtli. The Toltecs were skilled stonemasons, goldsmiths, lapidaries, possessors of knowledge recondite to the Aztecs. They were said to be refugees from a city named Tula, which had risen to power while Quetzalcoatl lived with them but which had fallen at his departure. Now they were biding their time and enduring adversity until he made good his promise and returned to Mexico.

Now many gods, being merely deified tribal heroes, retained physical peculiarities. Tezcatlipoca himself had a foot missing from his handsome, perennially youthful body. Nanahuatzin had syphilis. (Provided, that is, that modern medical science finally gives America the dubious pleasure of thus having paid Spain back in a little of her own coin. And I wonder if the legend of the heroic measure which Nanahuatzin took to cure himself would throw any light on the question.) But a long yellow beard!

Too, at that stage in the evolution of religious institutions Quetzalcoatl's quirk about sacrifice must have been regarded in much the same way as would be the refusal of a minister of a Christian congregation to partake of the communion on the ground that it is but a sublimation of human sacrifice and the attendant sacramental cannibalism.

But the Toltecs were "blue bloods," so when the Aztecs elected their first ruler in 1375 the choice fell on one Acamapichtli, who claimed descent on his mother's side from Toltec royalty. His son, Huitzilhuitl, relieved Tenochtitlán of the payment of tribute by marrying a daughter of the ruler of Atzacapotzalco. The refusal of that city to furnish lime and stone to repair the aqueduct built by Chimalpopoca to bring water from Chapultepec precipitated war between the Aztecs and their former masters. The fourth ruler, Itzcoatl, entered into an alliance with Texcoco, which led to the destruction of Atzacapotzalco and the formation of the Tri-City League, which operated smoothly up to the Spanish Conquest. The smaller city of Tlacopan received one fifth of the spoils of war, while the remainder was divided equally between Tenochtitlán and Texcoco. Tenochtitlán directed the military policy of the league, however, demonstrating that the Aztecs had become the dominant power in Anáhuac.

The Aztec eagle had swallowed the Toltec serpent.

To call these rulers kings and their successors emperors is to give an erroneous idea of the Aztec state. Even Prescott was overly impressed by the pomp and pageantry surrounding the last Moctezuma and failed to remember that beneath the gold and silver and quetzal feathers this was an American ruler and these American institutions whose background was not the minarets of Bagdad but the cornfields which had produced as well the Muskogean Confederacy and the League of the Iroquois. Bandelier was nearer the truth when he went to the other extreme and termed the Aztec state a loose confederacy of democratic nations and Moctezuma little more than an executive with limited personal authority.

The mainspring of the system was the executive council, composed of representatives from each of the twenty geographical clans which formed the nation. It elected the ruler, whose title of *tlatoani* meant literally "speaker." When the office became vacant, according to Sahagún, our best sixteenth-century authority, the council members "chose one of the

most noble of the lineage of the deceased rulers, who had to be valiant, skilled in war, daring, spirited and not given to pulque drinking; one who was prudent, learned and educated in the Calmecac (the college for sons of the nobility); one who was a good speaker, who possessed understanding and caution, who was gallant and warmhearted." After a rigid initiation the candidate was invested with the robes of office, but he did not enter upon his duties until he had led a campaign and returned with prisoners of war for sacrifice at a solemn inauguration.

The ruler had to be chosen from one family, although it was not necessary that he be the son of the deceased. The whole social structure rested on the principle of communistic landholding. Otherwise what evidence we have supports the view that the Aztecs conducted a reasonably successful experiment in democracy.

True, their state seems to have been evolving into an empire when it was cut short, but this was largely due to the autocratic pretensions of the last Moctezuma, and the process was complicated and retarded by a cross-purpose to an extent surely unparalleled in history. Indeed one cannot read the record of expansion under the first Moctezuma, Axayacatl, Tizoc and Ahuitzol without thinking that such empire building as took place was incidental to the service of religion. The primary objective of the last army led by Moctezuma the Younger was that of the first war party which set out from the mound on which Huitzilopochtli's travel-worn image had been placed: sacrifices. In proportion as that mound grew to the dimensions at which the Spaniards gaped, Aztec hegemony spread outward. Ahuitzol is reported to have sacrificed twenty thousand prisoners of war at the dedication of the reconstructed *teocalli*. An estimate of the exaggeration in that figure must take into account the fact that he carried the eagle and jaguar banners farther than any of his predecessors, so that his son, Moctezuma, could claim dominion from the Pánuco to northern Guatemala, from Acapulco on



the Pacific to the sand dunes where Vera Cruz now stands.

Aztec rule rested comparatively lightly on a conquered province. Once its contingent of prisoners had been dispatched to Tenochtitlán, little attempt at assimilation was made. An Aztec governor was installed, an Aztec garrison planted, a tribute of local produce and manufactures levied. Otherwise things remained much as they were. The original ruler was subordinate but he stayed in office with the same laws to enforce. The laxness of this system was conducive to revolt but, far from being undesirable, revolt gave the Aztecs another harvest of sacrifices, who were most acceptable to Huitzilopochtli when taken in battle.

If upon the accession of a ruler there was no insurrection to put down, no interference with the highly respected traveling merchants to punish, he was under the necessity of pushing into new territory for inaugural prisoners or having a go at the Tlaxcalans, a Nahuatl tribe which a large infusion of Toltec blood helped make hostile to the Aztecs. The Tlaxcalans themselves worshiped Huitzilopochtli, in his role of patron of hunting, under the name of Camaxtli. They had entrenched themselves in the mountains east of the Valley of Mexico, closing a gap of six miles with a massive wall, and, aided by the Otomies and other peoples who had been unable to resist the Aztecs on their own ground, defied every effort to dislodge them. Asked by the Spaniards why he let Tlaxcala maintain her independence on his borders, Moctezuma replied, perhaps with some truth, "that she might continue to furnish him with victims for his gods."

"Flower wars," these campaigns in the service of the gods were called. Military glories were "like a showering down of roses" by Huitzilopochtli. In one case the name was not allegorical. On the steaming Isthmus of Tehuantepec, near the town of Juchitán, "Place of Flowers," grows the curious *árbol de las manitas*, "tree of the little hands," so called from the resemblance of its red heart-stimulating blossom to a thumb and four fingers. Taken by the beauty of the *manitas*

which merchants brought back to Tenochtitlán, Moctezuma sent an embassy to the chief of Yucuaue demanding a specimen of the tree for his gardens. When the chief refused an Aztec army swept down into the jungles and returned with both flowering trees and prisoners.

A ritual was prescribed for the declaration of war. Except in case of a revolt the battlefield was selected in advance by both sides and the day of the engagement agreed on after consultation with astrologers. The army arriving first stood and had its enthusiasm whipped up by pulque and the exhortations of its priests until the adversary came upon the scene. If the two armies proved evenly matched, as usually happened with the Tlaxcalans, fighting was continued until each had its quota of captives, when they called it quits and marched home. As Indians of the northern plains considered it a greater honor to count coup on a living enemy than to kill him, so Aztec warriors received rewards in proportion to the number of their prisoners, with no account taken of those who merely slew their opponents. Hence the seeming paradox of battles in which most loss of life was either unavoidable or accidental.

Death on the altar took the place of death on the battlefield, then, and sacrifice had the meaning which the word has, etymologically, for us. Souls went from either place "o'er the Pathway of the Dawning, o'er the Highway of the Roses," to join Tonatiuh, the sun, in his daily journey from the eastern horizon to the zenith, from which point he was escorted to his setting by the souls of women who had died in childbirth.

The Mexican was more logical than the Christian. Professing contempt for mortal life, he did not balk at surrendering it on such good terms. He had no concept of his own of punishment after death, so that the Catholic Church met with failure when it tried to inculcate the doctrine of hell-fire. This passage to the sun by way of a violent end was the nearest approach which Mexico had to a concept of reward after death. The bodies of those who had been drowned or struck

by lightning were not cremated in the usual Aztec fashion, but buried. Since their deaths were attributed to the Tlalocs, their souls were believed to go to the eastern paradise of the rain gods, where corn, beans and squashes were plentiful and where suffering and pain were unknown. The souls of persons who had died a natural death descended to Mictlan, a dark underworld decidedly less pleasant than the realms of the sun and of the Tlalocs, but in no respect a place of punishment.

With only these three prospects in the afterlife, it is not surprising to read of a captured Tlaxcalan chief refusing his freedom and insisting that he be granted a sacrificial death.

Mexicans have always believed that the living may remain in direct communication with the souls of the dead and that these are so far corporeal as to appreciate gifts of food and drink, copal incense and flowers, particularly the *cempoalxochitl*, the yellow marigold. The dead have merely "moved their sleeping mats." This intimacy with death shocks the Caucasian. He calls it gruesome. I think that his reaction to a belief which is separate and apart from any concerning human sacrifice accounts for the facile statements by white men about the influence of this last institution on the Mexican character. Prescott, a thorough historian but one who never visited Mexico, summed up the popular notion when he wrote:

"The perpetual recurrence of ceremonies, in which the people took part, associated religion with their most intimate concerns, and spread the gloom of superstition over the domestic hearth, until the character of the nation wore a grave and even melancholy aspect, which belongs to their descendants at the present day."

This is to lose sight of the fact that human sacrifice has been a universal culture trait, practiced by remote ancestors of Mr Prescott. At the most the Aztecs made more of a routine out of it than other peoples. Perhaps some of the melancholy to which the New Englander referred came from three hundred years of slavery.

I should say, rather, that the genius of the Aztec expressed itself in the *form* of the sacrifice, just as it did in the cult of that common property of mankind, flowers. These sacrifices by which human beings were "made sacred" were not the senseless butcheries described by Spaniards who had never witnessed them. The invaders saw only the skulls and caked blood in the *teocallis* and would have thought their own souls in danger of damnation had they failed to find the inspiration of the devil in everything.

The modern Mexican viewpoint on human sacrifice was expressed by Father Servando José de Mier y Guerra in the nineteenth century, when he threw these words into the face of his own church and of the land from which his ancestors had come:

"It ill befits the Spaniards to reproach us the sacrifices which were less than three hundred years old, when they adored as *holy* for six centuries the Inquisition which in forty years immolated in Spain alone four hundred thousand victims. Our victims were respected as offerings made to the Gods, and reflected honor on their relatives; victims, you called infamous, and rendered their descendants infamous to the fourth generation. Ours were killed with the blow of a knife; yours, thousands of times expired on the rack and under horrible tortures which your priests witnessed before frying them on the brazier."

At the end of the second decade of the sixteenth century, when we get a sudden glimpse of Aztec civilization through European eyes, the practice of human sacrifice had almost, if not quite, reached its peak. In the ordinary process of evolution it would have disappeared gradually; bread and wine would have become the symbols of flesh and blood. Or a messiah, coming at the psychological moment, might have cleared away the complex ritualism which was making the religious pyramid top heavy—and with it human sacrifice.

Mexico's thoughts *were* turning to a messiah, yellow-

bearded Quetzalcoatl, who had expressed the wish that flowers, not blood, be offered on his altars. That psychological moment may well have been the spring morning in 1521 when a yellow-bearded, steel-jacketed young man, whom the Mexicans adoringly called Son of the Sun, watched with his blue eyes the opening of a fiesta which has been described by a priest of his religion:

"In this fiesta the Aztecs sacrificed a youth of a polished disposition, who had been kept for a year in idle luxury, for they said that he was the living personification of Tezcatlipoca. They had a large number of these young men set aside, chosen from among the finest of the prisoners of war, and great care was taken that they should be the cleverest and of the best disposition, without a blemish on their bodies. The youth who was being prepared for death was carefully taught to play the flute and handle reed tobacco pipes and flowers. They showed him how to walk about smoking and smelling flowers, as was done in the best homes and in the palace.

"The tutors who had charge of these youths until it was announced that they were to die took great pains to teach them good manners, such as how to speak and how to greet those whom they met on the streets, for, once they had been chosen for the part of the god, everyone who met them treated them with great reverence. If they began to grow fat under this regimen they were given salt water to keep them slender.

"Once the youth had been delegated to die, he began to wander through the streets playing his flute, with his flowers and his pipe. He was at liberty to stroll over the city by day and by night, eight pages dressed in court fashion always accompanying him. When it had been proclaimed that this youth was to be sacrificed in the next fiesta the chief ruler dressed him in rare and costly clothing, for now he was regarded as a substitute for the god. They painted his entire body and face; they decorated his head with white feathers

attached by means of resin. His hair reached to his waist. After dressing him in rich clothing they placed on him a garland of the flowers known as *izquixochitl* (the fragrant *Bourreria luanita*) and a long wreath of the same flowers hung from his shoulders to his armpits on both sides. In his ears they put ornaments like gold earrings and round his neck a string of precious stones . . . On his legs were placed gold bells, which tinkled wherever he went. . . .

"Twenty days before the fiesta they changed these clothes . . . and married him to four maidens, whose company he enjoyed for those twenty days that remained to him of life. These maidens also had been raised in great luxury and were given the names of four goddesses. . . .

"Five days before the fiesta they honored him as a god. The ruler remained alone in his house, while all persons of rank followed the young man, entertaining him at banquets, attired in their richest clothing. . . .

"On the last day, with his women to console him, he was put into a canoe with an awning, in which the ruler was wont to travel. They sailed to a point near the Iztapalapan-Chalco road, where there is a hill named Acaquilpan. Here his women and the crowd left him and returned to the city. There remained with him only the eight attendants who had accompanied him all that year.

"They took him to a small, poorly adorned pyramid beside the road, in an uninhabited district a league or so from the city. Alone, he climbed the steps. On the first step he broke one of the flutes on which he had played during his time of good fortune. On the second step he broke another, on the third another. In this way he destroyed them all, one by one, as he went up the steps.

"At the top the priests were ready for him. They took him and laid him on his back on the stone block. Priests held his feet, hands and head, while the one with the knife plunged it into his breast with a great blow. Removing the knife, the

priest put his hand into the wound, tore out the heart and offered it to the sun. . . .

"Thus he who had been showered with gifts and honored for a year ended his life. They said that this ceremony signified that those who have riches and pleasure during their lives must in the end come to poverty and pain."

## CHAPTER IV

# The Yellow Beard of Pedro de Alvarado

WHEN Henry Wadsworth Longfellow decided that American literature needed a one-hundred-per-cent-American poem, he chose as his subject the legends clustering about the culture heroes of two North American Indian tribes: Hiawatha of the Iroquois and Manaboho of the Algonquians. Hiawatha was given credit for the mighty deeds of both but, for the sake of fairness, was made an Algonquian. Then the question of verse confronted the poet. Supposing an Indian, before the coming of the white man, had felt moved to compose an epic—what meter would he have used?

While casting about for an answer, Longfellow must have consulted Prescott's *Conquest of Mexico*, which appeared eleven years before *Hiawatha*. Prescott had summarized what was known then of the literary accomplishments of the Mexicans prior to 1519. Little more could be said up until the nineteen twenties.

The Aztecs and their associates in the league had passed beyond the first stage in the development of writing, the pictographic, and were progressing toward a phonetic alphabet. In the transitional period use was made of the rebus, wherein pictures may be interpreted simply as pictures or as representing sounds. A drawing of a grasshopper on a hill, while it might be that and nothing more, was generally under-



stood to mean Chapultepec. Three symbols, however, had acquired a purely phonetic value. A drop of water falling into a basin with waves no longer signified *atl*, but the vowel *a*. (Aztec vowels have the same sounds as Spanish.) A human eye was not to be read *ixtelotli*, but *i*. Two parallel lines with human tracks between did not mean *otli*, "road," but *o*. It is safe to say that, given time, the Mexicans would have completed the invention that was made only once in history: by the Phoenicians or other Semites.

Imperfect as this system was, books were manufactured in quantities, mostly out of a paper like papyrus, made from maguey leaves and given a thin coating of lime. Sometimes this was done up into long rolls but more frequently the sheet was folded like a screen and bound in wood or dressed hide. Painting was in a variety of colors: red from cochineal or logwood; two yellows, vegetable and mineral; blue from certain flowers; white from chalk; black from soot of the ocotl palm. Colors were mixed, giving brilliant greens, purples and browns. "Even colors speak in the Aztec hieroglyphics," observed a Spanish chronicler.

Yet artistry of color and line can convey only limited messages, and those subject to misinterpretation. So this picture writing was merely auxiliary to oral tradition, a sort of shorthand which was studied in schools conducted by priests for carefully picked youths. All important manuscripts had their corresponding oral versions which were memorized over a scholastic period almost as long as our own. (It has been suggested that the present Mexican predilection for memorizing is due to this method of teaching, which prevailed in rural schools until recent times.)

True to its Toltec heritage, Texcoco was the literary and artistic center of Mexico. There flourished one of the most remarkable of pre-Conquest institutions, the Academy of Music, whose name only hints at its wide functions. The authority that the French Academy exercised over the drama of Corneille and Racine, the Texcocan had over all arts and

sciences. Poems, musical compositions, dances, had to have its stamp of approval. The best Nahuatl was spoken in Texcoco and the academy was exacting in its demand that the language's purity be preserved, that it always justify its name, "clear ringing as a bell." The academy served as a board of education, passing on the qualifications of all teachers and maintaining supervision of their work. Surely nowhere has history been so highly regarded as in Texcoco. The intentional falsifying of it was a capital offence. Regular contests were held by the academy, with the rulers of the three league cities sitting among the judges. Nezahualcoyotl himself, Lord of Texcoco, is said to have appeared among the competitors, with his gently melancholic poems on the hollowness of human vanity brightened now and then by some good old Epicureanism:

"The goods of this life, its glories and its riches, are but lent to us; its substance is but an illusory shadow and the things of today shall change on the coming of the morrow. Then gather the fairest flowers from thy gardens, to bind round thy brow, and seize the joys of the present—ere they perish . . ."

"Work of the devil!" cried the first Catholic archbishop of Mexico, Zumárraga, and consigned to the flames those libraries of Texcoco and Tenochtitlán which had survived the siege. "We set fire to the most important palace," wrote one of the Spaniards who made the entry into Texcoco, "and there were burned all the royal archives, all the chronicles of their ancient things, and also the other things which were like literature or stories were destroyed."

Sooner or later every visitor to Mexico City has the experience of being beckoned down a dark path of the Alameda by a man with his hatbrim pulled down over his eyes. Usually the bargain offered is a diamond. Sometimes it is an Aztec codex antedating the Conquest. I can't say as to the diamonds, but the person who wants a genuine codex might as well

spend his money on *jai alai*. Only fourteen Aztec codices, I believe, are known to be in existence; of the Maya, but three. These have given students much information on Aztec dress, customs, theology, but are incomplete without voices to recite from them.

Therefore in the course of time many authorities wondered if they hadn't been hoaxed by those early chroniclers who gave fine but tantalizingly brief Spanish "translations" of Aztec literature. After all, what proof was there that the Texcocan Academy wasn't a mere banqueting society?

Getting no help here in his search for a prototype for his projected American epic, Longfellow had recourse to the Old World, where the Finns, whose racial affiliations are with Asia rather than with Europe, possess the epic *Kalevala*. Its meter is trochaic, so the poet, well aware that the next man's guess would be as good as his, told the tale of Hiawatha to the *tumpty-tumpty-tumpty-tumpty* beat which so many school children have found monotonous—but easy to memorize.

Critics used to consider *Hiawatha* a synthetic product; about as genuinely Indian, so far as verse was concerned, as "Red Wing." But Longfellow's guess has been confirmed. Before the invasion of the whites, Indian poets *were* composing epics—and in the trochaic meter of *Hiawatha*. They had no choice of meter, really, because of the nature of their language, the Nahuatl.

Those names that clutter up Mexican maps and museum cards are not such tongue twisters if one disregards the accent imposed by Spanish and stresses every other syllable, with the final stress on the penult: Po-po'-ca-te'-petl, Ix'-tac-ci'-huatl, Hui-tzi'-lo-poch'-tli, Tez-ca'-tli-po'-ca, Que'-tzal-co'-atl . . .

One who noted how readily Nahuatl falls into trochaics was a newspaperman who had become engrossed in the search for the original literature of the Aztecs but had had to give it up as hopeless. John Hubert Cornyn may have had some of the trappings of the Richard Harding Davis tradition when he first went to Mexico for a Chicago journal, but I doubt it.

Since I have known him he has worn the manner of a college professor, although I believe he did say something once about having spent some time in New York in his younger days, turning out thrillers for pulp magazines on occasions when the regular contributors had headaches. Certainly the scholar was to the fore in 1920, when, translating some facsimile copies of post-Conquest Aztec manuscripts, he made a discovery which so revived his interest that he returned to Mexico. He is still there, at home to visitors in a sunny colonial mansion which he has named, with perfect right, Quetzalcoatl Palace.

"One day," he reminisces, "while translating some Aztec fables, which were apparently in prose, they began to amble along on trochaic legs. I found the same true of all forty-seven tales in the book. In this new light I examined scores of sixteenth-century Aztec documents. All were in meter and that meter was almost invariably trochaic, with nothing to distinguish the text from prose so far as outward appearance was concerned. From these I turned to Sahagún . . ."

Bernardino de Sahagún was a Franciscan monk who came to Mexico in 1529, learned Nahuatl and became a teacher in the mission schools which were being established for sons of the Mexican nobility. For over half a century he devoted himself to the collection of material for a history of Mexico, having his pupils write in the Spanish alphabet the oral traditions of their race that they had learned in the Aztec schools, sending them into the homes of the remaining Aztec and Texcocan nobles to take down at dictation what was remembered there. ("A scholar, yet surely no pedant, was he." He climbed both Popocatepetl and Ixtaccihuatl.) In spite of ecclesiastical frowns he finished his work and sent it to the Council for the Indies in Madrid. It disappeared for two centuries, for reasons which should not be hard to guess, but was published in 1829 under the title of *Historia General de las Cosas de la Nueva España* (History of the Things of New Spain).

Sahagún's source material, published later by the Mexican government, was the object of Mr Cornyn's scrutiny. Again

he found practically everything in trochaic meter. As a historian, the good father comes out in a rather dubious light, for he can scarcely be called the author of his *magnum opus*. His work, valuable in itself, consisted in little more than selecting, arranging and editing the Aztec literature which makes up those 1300 folio pages.

"As a sort of poetic justice," Mr Cornyn observes, "the Spanish alphabet came to save what Spanish intolerance sought to obliterate."

*The Song of Quetzalcoatl*, which Mr Cornyn has translated, is probably the most truly national of the works collected by Sahagún. At the same time it is one of the most lean and stripped, for in many of the "court poems" there is an imagery of fragrant flowers, gleaming jewels and warbling birds which approaches present-day Mexican oratory. In this epic some Aztec or Texcocoan bard has taken the pith of the old Toltec legends, wherein Quetzalcoatl alone was glorified, and carefully reworked it to emphasize how great was the triumph of the Nahua deities, Huitzilopochtli and Tezcatlipoca, over the yellow-bearded prophet and his city of Tula.

*All the glory of the godhead  
Had the prophet Quetzalcoatl;  
All the honor of the people.  
Sanctified his name and holy;  
And their prayers they offered to him  
In the days of ancient Tula.*

Fifty miles north of Mexico City, in the state of Hidalgo, is the old town of Tula, which must be the Tollan where the Aztecs stopped. There are ruins near by antedating them, and it was once thought that this was the Toltec capital. Later excavation outside the village of San Juan Teotihuacán, where reeds once grew on the shores of Lake Texcoco, leaves no doubt that there stood Quetzalcoatl's city.

*There in grandeur rose his temple;  
Reared aloft its mighty ramparts,*

*Reaching upward to the heavens.  
Wondrous stout and strong the walls were;  
High the skyward-climbing stairway,  
With its steps so long and narrow,  
With its many steps so narrow  
That there scarce was room for setting,  
Room for placing of the footsteps.*

Teotihuacán. "Where We Make Our God and Have Him." The dwellings of its human inhabitants, being built of perishable materials, are gone with them. Its holy places remain, set back from the broad Highway of the Dead: the Pyramid of the Sun in the center, that of the moon at the north, and at the south Quetzalcoatl's shrine.

This last is a quadrangular court, with its four main axes oriented to the four points of the compass. To my mind the complex of pyramids, altars and stairs which it incloses takes describing in mathematical terms. One should give the length, height and thickness of each wall, the dimensions of each platform, the number of steps in each staircase. It can be fully appreciated only by those unhappy individuals who are pestered by little demons when they see a picture hanging crookedly upon a wall, a rug out of alignment with a baseboard, a book turned upside down in a row. Here nothing—by so much as a hair's breadth, I say—is wrong.

*And his people, they the Toltecs,  
Wondrous skilled in all the trades were,  
All the arts and artifices,  
So that naught there was they knew not;  
And as master workmen worked they.  
Fashioned they the sacred emeralds;  
Fashioned they the precious turquoise;  
Smelted they both gold and silver.  
Other arts and trades they mastered;  
In all crafts and artifices*

*Skilled were they as wondrous workmen.  
And in Quetzalcoatl all these  
Arts and crafts had their beginning;  
In him all were manifested.  
He the master workman taught them  
All their trades and artifices.*

Yet stand for a while in the center of the truncated top of the pyramid in the center of the court, knowing because you have counted them that each of the stairways before and behind you, at your right and at your left, contains the thirteen steps that symbolize the cycles of the first sun age—and this symmetry attained by men without instruments of precision becomes perverse. Something, somewhere, should be out of kilter to make this beautiful instead of cold and satisfactory. Perhaps there was when Quetzalcoatl's worshipers ascended these steps, sideways that they might not face his image. On Maya steles are mistakes in dates so glaring that they cannot have escaped notice at the time of erection, such errors in sculptured figures as a priest with both hands left ones. It has been suggested that the Maya deliberately avoided perfection, since it was given to the gods alone to produce a thing without a flaw.

Buying a sarape in a Mexican market, one looks for that little falter in the design which shows that it was made by hand, not by a machine, which never slips.

Under Quetzalcoatl life was perfect in Tula, we hear. Ears of corn had to be carried in the arms, they were so long and thick. Squashes grew so large that men could scarcely join their hands around them. So tall and stout were the amaranth stalks that "like trees they used to climb them."

*Ready colored grew the cotton,  
Red and yellow, rose and purple,  
Green and bluish, verdigris,  
Black and orange, gray and crimson,*

*Blushing like the ripening berry.  
Ready colored grew the cotton  
And no need was there to dye it.*

Yet that murk of doom which so curiously hung over Mexico at the start of the sixteenth century was thickening about this terrestrial paradise. Quetzalcoatl was becoming enfeebled with years when "necromancers," Tezcatlipoca and Huitzilopochtli, came to Tula, bent on its destruction. Transforming himself into an old man, the youthful Tezcatlipoca gained an audience with Quetzalcoatl, talked insidiously of a land of rest in the east, Tollan-tlalpan, and prevailed upon the prophet to taste the medicine which he had brought. When Quetzalcoatl pronounced the liquid "good and pleasant" the necromancer urged him to drink again.

*Once again drank Quetzalcoatl;  
Drank to deep intoxication;  
Drank until he fell to weeping,  
Till his heart rejoiced within him;  
Till his soul burst forth in gladness  
And was filled with ceaseless longing  
To that distant land to journey.  
And this longing never left him;  
For his head was ever turning,  
Through the work of the enchanter,  
To the land of Tollan-tlalpan,  
Distant land of Tollan-tlalpan.  
Like the white wine, says tradition,  
Was the medicine enchanting,  
Fashioned from the honeyed water,  
From the sap of the maguey.*

Spells not so easily understood were cast upon Quetzalcoatl's people, as Tezcatlipoca assumed the forms of chili vender, singer, warrior, medicine woman, corn witch; as Huitzilopochtli became a child, dancing on his palm, to lure



the Toltecs to their death. At last, in desperation, Quetzalcoatl left the city. (First burying all his treasures, as men will tell you today who have searched for them and who will search again as soon as someone gives them a grubstake.) The epic contains a list of places where the prophet is supposed to have stopped. Quauhtitlan, "olden town within the forest," north of Mexico City, is doubtless one of the localities in which Toltecs settled after the fall of Tula. Mitla, "place of the departed," is here said to have been built by Quetzalcoatl, although it appears in history as a Zapotec city. This would seem to indicate that the early inhabitants of the Oaxacan region were culturally indebted to the Toltecs. In Tabasco the Maya lost sight of Kukulcan, and when Quetzalcoatl turned southward into that "wondrous fertile country" one may, if he wishes, believe that he is reading the record of an actual journey.

*Marching, ever onward marching,  
Came the prophet to the seashore.  
There he built a raft of serpents;  
Formed and shaped it like a vessel;  
And therein himself he seated;  
Straightway there himself he scated.  
Just as in a formal sea boat,  
In an ocean-going vessel,  
Proudly there himself he seated.*

*Outward, onward, ever moving,  
O'er the far-extending waters  
Went the serpent-fashioned vessel  
Till at last from sight it vanished  
O'er the distant-stretching ocean.  
To this day 'tis not known  
How the prophet Quetzalcoatl  
Reached the region of Tlapallan;  
Came unto the red dominions  
Of the Sun his royal master.*

Well, what's the truth about Quetzalcoatl, Kukulcan to the Maya, Gukumatz to the Quichés, Yukano to the Mixtecs? Quetzalcoatl who would be the Santa Claus of Mexican children now if a secretary of education had had his way in 1930.

Was he a Viking who outdid that stout company which discovered Vinland but who never returned with the tale? Many believe so. The man or the myth, whichever you choose, had a Huastec origin. Quetzalcoatl appears in the codices in Huastec clothing, particularly a distinctive pointed headdress. Legend has him landing with twenty followers (those twenty of whom frequent mention is made) at the mouth of the Pánuco, near modern Tampico, where a ship moving southward along the Gulf coast would in all likelihood put in. From there, supporters of this theory say, he set out on an exploring trip through the interior, spending some time with the Toltecs, the Maya and other peoples, and being hailed everywhere as a white god, in good old storybook fashion. He finally made his way back to the coast, and his ship picked him up at the mouth of the Coatzacoalcos River, where Puerto México now stands. There, it is true, legend has messengers from the sun waiting to carry him away. After his departure he became a Mexican culture hero, priests of his cult and temporal rulers taking his name and adding their deeds to the growing body of those ascribed to him.

But if one starts taking myths at their face value he soon has ancient Mexico as amazing a place as some of those Herodotus wrote about. The consensus of opinion among anthropologists is that Quetzalcoatl is the embodiment of a solar myth, hence his association with the east coast and the Atlantic. Yellow was the sacred color of the sun, so as its messenger he was given a beard like the rays of the sun. Nowhere in native sources is there a statement that before the coming of the Spaniards Mexicans thought of his skin as being white.

There is another explanation of that beard. In *The Song of the Ages*, an older epic, Quetzalcoatl appears as a Prometheus who brought fire and maize from the underworld. Given this

role as originator of agriculture, may he not have acquired whiskers from the tassel of the corn?

Yet those Norse galleys often had sea serpent figureheads, didn't they? And to worshipers of the Feathered Serpent . . .

Leaving this squirrel cage of speculation before it revolves again (it has never stopped and never will), there remain two features of the Quetzalcoatl story, the most curious of the lot, which furnish the key to what happened to Mexico in the sixteenth century. Quetzalcoatl was known as the wearer of Huastec clothing, yes, but on that clothing were crosses. Also, the Aztecs had heard from the Toltecs that when he departed in a year Ce Acatl (One Reed), the date on which the Venus cycle was supposed to start every 104 solar years, he promised to return in another year One Reed.

Our 1415 A.D. was One Reed in the Aztec calendar. Fires flared on the great *teocalli* at Cholula while priests watched the east. Nothing happened.

Seventy years later in the province of Extremadura, Spain, two new subjects of their Catholic majesties, Ferdinand and Isabella, were born. One, Hernán Cortés, was dark haired and dark eyed, like the common run of Mediterraneans, with a Castilian hook to his long nose. The other was a throwback to some blue-eyed, yellow-maned Visigoth or Vandal. As if nature had wished no halfway measures with this rarity, everyone agreed that he was the most beautiful child in the city of Badajoz. We are prepared to find blondness conspicuous in Mexico. We forget how much attention it attracted in Spain, particularly in the south, where the sun is African and where Moorish blood was longest at work. The literature of the Golden Age furnishes ample proof. Lope de Vega and the other dramatists knew their public. Their choicest heroines appeared in blond wigs and listened to sonorous verse in which gallants likened their beauty to that of the sun. I am sure that this crowing infant was called "*mi sol*" before he was christened Pedro de Alvarado.

I am sure, too, that if one of our modern biographers

wanted to concern himself with this paragon of animals he would find that that hair determined his character to a large extent. It put him on a brightly lighted stage, as it were. Below him women hung on his words and smile and every movement of his trim figure. Men applauded his good humor and excellence in martial sports. Both were so ready to give him whatever he desired that young Pedro came to regard complaisance as his due. As soon as possible he enhanced his manly charm by growing a beard.

I wish that H. Rider Haggard, while he was familiarizing himself with Mexico's past in order to write *Montezuma's Daughter*, had seen the opportunity to make Quetzalcoatl an ancestor of Alvarado, with Baltic wisps calling to the blond Spaniard of a secret that lay in the dark lands of the West. Only a romancer, I am afraid, could find any lure working on Alvarado beyond those at work on most mettlesome young Spaniards. He was too young to have had his hopes dashed by the fall of Granada. There being no more Moorish palaces to plunder, no more rich infidels to capture and hold for ransom, older fellows, if they had money or influence, had turned reluctantly to the church or the law, the only desirable professions besides that of arms. (Of course no Castilian of the true breed gave a moment's consideration to anything smacking of trade or manual labor.) But when Alvarado and Cortés were seven Columbus had sailed westward, praying: "Oh Lord, direct me where I may find the gold mine."

Cortés had the same prayer on his lips when he followed in 1504. Assured on the island of Hispaniola that he would have no difficulty in securing an *encomienda*, a grant of land and Indians, he replied: "I came to get gold, not to till the soil like a peasant." The Spanish crown had forbidden the enslavement of the inhabitants of the New World, but Spain was far away and the conquerors had soon found a method whereby they could conform to the letter of the interdict without depriving themselves of the profits of slave labor. The governor of Hispaniola had obtained from Queen Isabella authority to

apportion the Indians among the Spaniards on the island "so that they might be instructed in Christian truths by edifying conversation and good example."

In 1510 Pedro de Alvarado, a bearded man of twenty-five, was cursing the slowness of the ship that bore him westward. He arrived at Hispaniola in time to join the Cuban expedition of Diego de Velásquez, however, and with Cortés to hunt the natives whom Columbus had described as "wondrously timid." After the leader of the resistance, a *cacique* or chief named Hatuey, had been captured and burned at the stake, Cortés and Alvarado were rewarded with deeds of *encomienda* reading:

"Unto you, so-and-so, are given in trust under Chief so-and-so, with the chief, so many Indians, for you to make use of in your farms and mines; and you are to teach them the things of the holy Catholic faith."

Cortés adapted himself to plantation life better than did his friend. Watching while others grubbed in the earth for gold and panned rivers for gold was an irksome occupation for one of Alvarado's impetuous temperament, and his Indians began to die off under the lashes which he, in his disgust, kept his overseers plying furiously. Somewhere, he told himself, gold in quantities never seen before was drawing him like a magnet.

Meanwhile in Anáhuac another year One Reed was approaching and vague rumors were drifting up to Tenochtitlán of tremendous events on the shores of the Caribbean. A state of mind was created that leads with any people to the seeing of omens. Comets streaked across the sky, and a fiery pyramid glowed over the Atlantic. The woodwork of a temple of Huitzilopochtli caught fire, presumably from the sun's rays, and was not to be extinguished by water. The face of the sun grew "red as crimson blood, crimson as the crimson pepper, ruddy colored as the ruby."

And it was Mexico's fate to have at this critical time a ruler who was to the last degree superstitious.

In 1517 an expedition from Cuba, under Hernández de Córdoba, raided the coast of Yucatán in quest of gold and of slaves to replace those who had succumbed to the *encomenderos*. One of the most insignificant of its members was a youngster named Bernal Díaz del Castillo, who had seen service down in Darien but who was almost as penniless as when he had come out from Medina del Campo, in the Spanish province of Valladolid, three years before.

In 1518 Juan de Grijalva sailed up the Mexican coast as far as the Pánuco. With him was beefy leather-jerkined Bernal Díaz, become a hero worshiper of flashing Pedro de Alvarado, "the handsomest man in the Indies," who was in command of a ship far in advance of the rest. Mexico first saw Alvarado in armor flecked by blood, for Yucatán now bristled with arrows and spears at the approach of a Spanish sail. Beyond the Coatzacoalcos his blue eyes spied the mouth of another river. He drove his ship far up it but was empty handed when he returned to listen good-naturedly to a reprimand from Grijalva for not staying with the fleet. Alvarado stood on the island of San Juan de Ulúa and, when the clouds lifted, gazed at the shapely white cone of Orizaba, the Aztec Poyautecatli, "Extending Shining One," which Quetzalcoatl saw as he was departing through the pass between Popocatepetl and Ixtaccihuatl:

*Looked he upward from his weeping;  
Saw there gleaming in the distance  
Mighty Poyautecatli  
With his head of shining silver,  
He who looks with gleaming features;  
Stands with face illuminated.*

Alvarado was one of those who would have gone to see what lay beyond, but Grijalva, considering himself unequipped as well as unauthorized to launch upon conquest, sent the blond captain back to Cuba with the gold that had been ob-

tained and a report for Governor Velásquez. Bernal Díaz wrote years afterward:

“Pedro de Alvarado was an entertaining talker and he had a good story to tell later of how the governor did nothing for a solid week but embrace him and celebrate in his honor. It had been known that there were riches in these new lands, but this gold made them the talk of the islands and of Spain.”

1519 was the year One Reed. In the spring the watchmen whom Moctezuma had posted along the Gulf coast sent him word of the return of the “water houses” filled with strangers. One of the men had a yellow beard. Men? Moctezuma sent for Quetzalcoatl’s feather headdress and turquoise snake mask. They had crosses on their banners.

## CHAPTER V

# Blood on the Sun

TIMES HAVE CHANGED since Mr Flandrau, making the trip from New York to Vera Cruz by water, found neither "tourists nor persons of fashion" on the deck of his steamer. All too many, of the former at least, have discovered that the voyage is both interesting and agreeable.

The tourist has made the discovery too that, after landing where Hernán Cortés landed on the dunes in 1519, the most interesting and agreeable part of his journey lies before him. Above him, rather. He is 457 feet lower than the motorist who is starting for Mexico City at Laredo, and his train will make in twelve hours the climb to which the other devotes two days. Phantoms will climb with him, in clinking armor, for if he travels via Córdoba he will be paralleling the route which the Spaniards followed to Tenochtitlán; if he chooses the narrow-gauge line through Jalapa, capital of Vera Cruz State, he will practically be retracing that march.

After sweating through the customs and shivering at stories about the dank cells of San Juan de Ulúa, the fortress in the harbor, the visitor to Vera Cruz seldom has energy enough left to do more than sit in the shadow of the arcades around the plaza and drink Orizaba beer until train time. So this is a good place to turn one's thoughts back to that Good Friday when a band of Spanish freebooters disembarked here—553



soldiers and 110 sailors with thirty-two crossbows, thirteen firearms, fourteen pieces of artillery and sixteen horses—and to notice how the scales had already been tipped in their favor by more factors than their arrival in a year One Reed.

The difference between this raiding party and the preceding ones lay in its open defiance of authority. While it is true that the governor of Cuba had made thirty-four-year-old Cortés captain general of the fleet which was being fitted out, not to colonize or conquer, but to explore the mainland and barter with the natives, Velásquez immediately had regretted his appointment and determined to remove the ambitious Extremaduran from the command. Forewarned, Cortés made such hasty preparations for sailing that the governor, arriving on the Santiago quay, could only fume impotently as a farewell drifted across the water: "Pardon me, your excellency, but time presses and there are some things that should be done before they are even thought of. *Adiós.*"

With a warrant out for his arrest, Cortés seized supplies along the coast before heading for Yucatán. Had he failed in his enterprise and returned, he would have been beheaded instant. But, handed a fifth of the loot and a large slice of a continent, the Spanish crown could only sanction the acts of this man who laughingly admitted in later life: "I certainly acted like a heathen pirate."

That was a motley troop, held together only by self-interest and by Cortés' personality. It numbered younger sons of noble families and criminals on parole from Spanish jails, promised pardons if they remained two years in the Indies. For most of what we know of them as individuals we can thank Bernal Díaz del Castillo. Touched off in his old age by a history of the Conquest written by Gomara, Cortés' chaplain, this bluff veteran took his pen firmly in hand, not to debunk Cortés, but to show, in the democratic spirit of Spain's Golden Age, that officers and men deserved to share in the glory which had gone exclusively to the commander.

First among the captains whose names should be written "in

letters of gold" Bernal Díaz puts Pedro de Alvarado, "a very brave hidalgo, who became *adelantado* and governor of the provinces of Guatemala, Honduras and Chiapas, and a commander of the Order of Santiago. He was handsome and gracious in person and bearing, of prime physique, well proportioned, light and agile. He was a good horseman, having with López de Ávila an excellent chestnut mare for exercise or service. After our arrival in New Spain Alvarado took her entirely to himself, either by purchase of a half interest or by force. In his dress Alvarado was immaculate and opulent, wearing about his neck a fine gold chain, with a carved jewel, and on one finger a diamond ring. Above all, he was open-hearted and affable. He was happy faced, with a twinkle in his eye, so that he seemed always to be laughing. And because of this grace of his the Mexicans called him Tonatiuh, the sun."

Alvarado's ship was the first to make a landfall—at Cozumel, the island off the east coast of Yucatán which still entertains strange visitors in the planes of the Pan American Airways system that ground there on the flight between Havana and Mérida. The fair captain hit Cozumel as did the tropical storm which had thrown Cortés off his course. The latter arrived to find the island apparently uninhabited except for the prisoners who cowered at Don Pedro's feet while he examined in disgust the gold and copper trinkets which were the best that his pillaging of towns and temples had produced. After wasting breath in reprimanding his favorite officer for lack of restraint Cortés coaxed the islanders out of hiding and began drawing more gold from the mainland than Cozumel possessed.

It was a profitable stop in more ways than one. Hearing from traders of a pair of Spaniards held captive two days' journey inland, Cortés sent a ransom of the green glass beads which he was exchanging for hefty gold, together with word that boats would wait a week on the opposite shore to bring them off. For all that negotiations were conducted with difficulty due to an imperfect knowledge of Spanish on the part

of the Yucatecan whom Cortés had brought from Cuba, this man served to interpret the preaching of the gospel to the scanty population of the island. Father Olmedo, a warm friend of Captain Alvarado, spent a busy week destroying idols, baptizing, performing mass, so that when hope of hearing from the unlucky Spaniards was abandoned and the fleet sailed he went consoled by the knowledge that Cozumel had been Christianized.

In a few years a Dominican, Bartolomé de las Casas was writing passionately:

"This is one of the errors and blunders that many have held and made in these parts, because, without having the Indians instructed for a long time, it is a monstrous mistake to take their idols from them. Idolaters never give up their idols voluntarily, because no one can leave of his own choice and with pleasure that which he has drawn in with his mother's milk, and that which on the authority of his elders for many years he had held as God, without first having understood that that which is given him in place of his god is the true God. Consider what doctrine priests could give them in two, three, four or in ten days that they were there, or even in a longer time, of the true God; neither could know what to give them to uproot the erroneous opinions about their gods, that going away, as they must go, the Indians would not return to idolatry. . . . They have made the Indians erect crosses, which they induced them to reverence. Well and good if there were time for it, or hope of reaping any benefit from it, or if they could be taught to understand it, but not having time, nor opportunity, nor language, it seems a superfluous and useless thing; because the Indians may think they are given an idol of that figure, which Christians have as God, so they will worship that stick as God, and be idolaters . . ."

"Here," Hatuey had said, flashing gold before the Cuban Indians, "is the God of the Spaniards." We shall find a Mexi-

can Indian uttering the same words. At least, conversion was a subsidiary or by-product of the hunt for gold.

It is hard to get at the men within the robes in making the acquaintance of these campaigning priests, so circumspect did the early historians have to be in discussing them. One I should like to know more about is Jerónimo de Aguilar, who in 1511 was shipwrecked on a voyage from Panama to Santo Domingo. He was among the survivors who escaped in a rowboat, but all the others except one died of hunger and exposure or were sacrificed on reaching Yucatán by the ruler of one of the many principalities into which the Maya state had disintegrated. Aguilar and a sailor named Gonzalo Guerrero made their escape by night from the cages in which they were awaiting sacrifice and fled into the interior, where they were haled before another chief who spared their lives but enslaved them. (The cult of Kukulcan seems to have died out among the Maya, or else they did not share with the Toltecs belief in his yellow beard and in his return. White men met with no reception as gods in Yucatán.) Sailor and priest rose in the chief's favor, however, and he finally offered them wives. One accepted with alacrity, the other had to refuse.

Poor Aguilar did his best to explain why matrimony was not for him, but vows of celibacy were beyond the comprehension of the chief. Suspecting that the Maya beauties were being scorned, he resolved on some tests. The curious might pass away a rainy afternoon in the Mexican National Library, digging into the Spanish chroniclers for the full story of the temptations of this New World St Anthony. Washington Irving, in his *Voyages and Discoveries of the Companions of Columbus*, goes no farther than the overnight fishing trip on which the chief sent Aguilar and a seductive partner with one hammock between them. One has to look to European writers for accounts of the subsequent nights which the priest spent praying on the floor of his bedroom, as he had prayed on the beach, and of the final daybreak when on calloused

knees he listened to the prolonged death screams of the girl whom he was letting pay the price of failure.

The chief was convinced then that Aguilar meant what he said. So at the end of eight years one Spaniard had charge of his master's domestic affairs, including his wives, while the other was his adviser in things military.

Then messengers came from the seashore with news of eleven ships filled with white men waiting at Cozumel for their countrymen. The chief hesitated. He was reluctant to let them go, but the green stones which had been sent for their ransom were beautiful, therefore valuable.

He summoned Aguilar and told him that he and Guerrero were free, if they could get to the coast in time.

Beside himself with joy, Aguilar hurried to Guerrero's comfortable home under the palms, stepping over children. But the other shook his head. He was happy there, a great general among the Maya, and he wasn't going to give up this life for the doubtful benefits of a civilization in which he had been an underdog. "Not me," he said in Mayan, touching the ornaments in his ears. "Do you think I'm going to let those damned Spaniards make fun of me because my lobes are pierced? Go on, Aguilar. I'm staying with my family. Did you ever see handsomer children than those? Let them have a glass bead apiece to play with. I'll say my brothers sent them from overseas. That's all I'll accept from Spaniards."

"But you are a Christian, Guerrero. You have gone eight years without mass and communion. Your soul—" Aguilar stopped and his eyes fell, for Guerrero was looking at him steadily.

"I've seen how Christians save their souls," Guerrero said. "I'll risk mine with the Indians."

His wife descended on them then and sent the priest a-pack-ing. Her contemptuous laughter followed him and in the hot still air it may have rung in his ears like the echoes of screaming.

He never saw the renegade again, although he must have

heard of him. Guerrero organized the resistance which met the Spaniards at Cape Catoche and is said to have died in a battle with the invaders.

No ships stood off Cozumel when Aguilar reached the coast. Then—lo and behold!—here they came sailing back. A miracle, affirms a writer of the time, for they had gone but a little distance when a leak in one brought orders from Cortés to return to the island.

The Spaniards took all the seminaked occupants of the canoe which sped from the mainland to be Indians and were startled when one of them fell on his knees before them, trying to talk in the language which he had almost forgotten.

A gallant, scarred as Cortés was from dueling over lights-o'-love, would have scant sympathy with Aguilar in part of the tale that came out as the latter gradually recovered the use of his mother tongue. He was quick to see the utility of the priest's other experiences, however, and as the fleet rounded the cape into the Bay of Campeche he pressed him for information about the resources of Yucatán and the dissensions among its inhabitants. But as yet he had no inkling of the far-reaching consequences of Aguilar's proficiency in the Mayan dialects.

First Cortés had demonstrated to him, in a pitched battle outside the town of Tabasco, the tremendous psychological effect that firearms and horses were going to have throughout Mexico. The Tabascans believed rider and steed to be one animal, a centaur discharging lightning and thunder. If we are inclined to smile at their terror from our twentieth-century vantage ground, we might recall the October night in 1938 when a radio dramatization of Wells's *War of the Worlds* sent a good part of the population of the United States into streets and fields to escape death at the hands of invading Martians. The Tabascans saw and heard their monsters.

The neighboring chiefs came in to surrender then, bringing gifts: a little gold and twenty slave girls. Here Aguilar became indispensable, for the Yucatecan interpreter had fled at the

first opportunity. Questioned by the priest as to the source of the gold, the Tabascans gestured toward the west and replied: "Mexico." The Spaniards sailed westward, far from guessing that they had aboard a girl who was to open many of the doors between them and the Mexican treasure house. Malinche, she is called in Mexico.

Historical novelists have made the first crossing of glances between her and Cortés more electric a moment, I am afraid, than it really was. We owe practically all our knowledge of Malinche to Bernal Díaz. Of that morning after Lady-day when the Tabascans brought their gifts, he writes, after carefully enumerating every bit of goldwork:

"This present was nothing compared to twenty women, among them a very excellent woman who was given the name Doña Marina at conversion. Her noble birth showed in her person, for she was the daughter of great chiefs and a ruler in her own right. I do not remember the names of all the other women, and they are not important, but they were the first female Christians in New Spain. Cortés distributed them among the captains; this Doña Marina, being good looking, lively and forward, he gave to Alonzo Hernández Puertocarrero, who, as I have said, was a very good knight, cousin of the Count of Medellín. After Puertocarrero went back to Spain Doña Marina became Cortés' mistress and had a son by him, Martín Cortés, who became commander of the Order of Santiago."

Good drama is made of a promise by Cortés to give Puertocarrero first choice among the slaves and of strained relations between them when the underofficer takes Malinche. But we find the two men in apparently friendly conversation as their ship winds along the coast toward San Juan de Ulúa. Bernal Díaz and others who sailed this way with Grijalva are pointing out such familiar sights as the river and landlocked harbor which were given the name of their beaming explorer, Pedro de Alvarado. Seeing nothing but palms and sand that glittered deceptively like gold in the sun (sand which paled when

Alvarado's hair and trim pointed beard were against it and which might have been doomed by that name to soak up blood thereafter), Puertocarrero says to Cortés: "I advise you to look out only for the rich lands," thereby, it seems, earning a reputation as a wit.

At San Juan de Ulúa is the first occasion when we can be sure that Malinche attracted Cortés' attention. Important-looking Mexicans came on board who spoke a language which Aguilar did not understand, in spite of the eloquence of their gestures. (Mexicans never had anything to learn from Latins on that score.) Malinche was brought forward. She was a native Mexican, it developed, and likewise spoke the Mayan of Tabasco, into which territory she had been sold as a slave by her mother and stepfather. She willingly translated the visitors' Nahuatl speeches into Mayan, which Aguilar in turn put into Spanish.

These were subjects of Moctezuma who had been sent by the governor of that province to learn who the strangers were and what they wanted. If they needed anything for themselves or their "water houses" it would be supplied them. Cortés let them sample Spanish wine while he pumped them for particulars about Moctezuma and the amount of gold in Mexico, then suggested that the governor call in person. Gold, he had found out, was known in Mexico as "the excrement of the gods."

The smooth working of this method of communication "was a good beginning for our conquest," observes Bernal Díaz, and goes on to summarize the girl's story in these words: "As Doña Marina was such an excellent woman and good linguist, for this reason Cortés kept her with him throughout the Mexican wars. Afterward he married her to a hidalgo named Juan Xaramillo . . . And Doña Marina was of great importance and her word was law to the Indians all over New Spain."

That has to be her epitaph, for nothing is known of the rest of her life. Regardless of her intimate relations with Cortés,



the nature of which can only be guessed at, her role certainly transcended an interpreter's. She became invaluable from a military standpoint by her grasp of the weaknesses of the Aztec state and by her constant advice on how best to take advantage of them. She betrayed her people, of course, but they have never had hatred for her, as for Cortés. Pity, rather, because of the bitterness of her disillusionment. Over the Pedregal, under the Atzacapotzalco cypresses, through the grottoes of Chapultepec, her spirit still wanders, they say, weeping and unable to find rest. . . .

On Easter the Aztec governor paid his visit to the arbors which the curious natives had helped the Spaniards build on the dunes that rose highest above the stagnant marshes. He listened to mass politely but stood upon his dignity once Cortés spoke of Charles V as the world's greatest emperor, in whose name he would like to call on Moctezuma. With a grand gesture the Mexican ordered proof of Moctezuma's greatness spread before these strangers: fine cotton cloth, feather mantles and, since they complained of suffering from a disease of the heart which only the divine excrement could cure, a basketful of ornaments of wrought gold.

Meanwhile painters were at work, sketching the Spaniards and their belongings for Moctezuma's benefit. Informed of this, Cortés produced the same effect as on the Tabascans by sending Alvarado, mounted on his chestnut mare, to lead the cavalry in a mock charge along the beach while the artillery blasted the underbrush.

In one of the paintings that went to Tenochtitlán Alvarado had the face of an idealized man, a bright metallic breast and the lower parts of a rampant red animal, spewing fire.

Before the disconcerted governor left, with a promise to communicate with the capital, "he noticed a soldier wearing a helmet half of gilt. Some helmets like that, he said, had come down to them from their ancestors, and one adorned the head of their war god, Huichilobos. Moctezuma would be interested in seeing this. So they gave him the helmet, Cortés telling him

to return it filled with gold dust for our great emperor, in order that he might see if the gold in this country was like that taken from the rivers of Spain. . . . When Moctezuma compared the helmet with the one which their Huichilobos wore he knew for a certainty that we belonged to the race which their ancestors had predicted would come to rule that land."

Like his mates, Bernal Díaz had difficulty with Aztec names. Either he meant Quetzalcoatl or Huitzilopochtli's priests had appropriated a helmet from the inferior deity. But—*¡Por dios, hombre!*—don't forget to tell us what kind of a headpiece it turned out to be. I remember my exasperation when I first read on in *La Conquista de la Nueva España* and found no further mention of it. Yet given an iota of curiosity when he visited the great *teocalli* of Tenochtitlán, our historian might have solved the riddle of the yellow-bearded god.

Of the return of the Spanish helmet he writes fully enough, although he slips up on New World fauna. A week later the governor was back, with ambassadors from Moctezuma who unwrapped "a marvelous gold plate, as big as a cart wheel, carved to represent the sun and worth, our men said who weighed it, more than twenty thousand *pesos de oro*." (Over ten thousand dollars.) "Also a larger silver plate, representing the moon in her splendor, heavy and worth a great deal. And they delivered the helmet full of gold, in chunks as they extract it from the mines, and that gold we held to be of more value than thirty thousand *pesos*, for it proved to us the existence of good mines. Besides, they brought twenty gold ducks, finely worked and very lifelike; many images of dogs, tigers, lions, monkeys; ten necklaces of the finest workmanship; pendants; twelve arrows and a bow with its string; two rods like those of justice, five palms long—all this cast in fine gold. Then crests of gold and silver and rich green feathers, fans of the same materials, deer cast in gold . . ."

And to these gold hunters, whose feverish eyes were giving back the glitter of that gold, was delivered Moctezuma's message: He was glad that they had visited his country, but an

interview was out of the question. It was a hard journey and a long one to Tenochtitlán, made dangerous by enemies. They were to accept these things as a farewell present.

Cortés sent back a Florentine goblet and three Holland shirts. He had already come a long way to see Moctezuma, and his emperor wouldn't like it if he left without having done so.

"Let there be no more talk of visits," came the peremptory response, "and no more sending of messages. Good-by!"

There was a fluttering of wings on the sand dunes as the envoys stalked off, to be followed in the dead of night by the entire settlement which had been supplying the army with turkeys and fish, tortillas and pineapples. Then the *zopilotes* hopped closer to the stinking camp. Short pickings there now, but they were old in the meaning of that. . . .

Dog days. "The cassava flour soured and grew moldy and full of weevils, so in order to eat we had to wade out and pick shellfish. And some of the soldiers who were accustomed to owning Indians in Cuba were continually sighing to return." One can read between Bernal Díaz' lines. Panic was at work, while men shed blistering armor and doubled up with dysentery, which is worse than a dozen wounds because no soldier can bear it heroically. Thirty-five died. The partisans of Governor Velásquez began to talk mutiny. Soon northers would howl down the coast and sweep their ships from the open bay. And hell's own forces were massing in those mountains. They knew it, they said in unnatural tones, crossing themselves. *That was the meaning of this pall of stillness.*

Unshaken, Cortés sent vessels north to find a safer anchorage and a location for a settlement. The army stewed, the shadows of the patient *zopilotes* upon it, and tried not to look southward at the Island of Sacrifices, itself shaped like an altar, where the previous year Spaniards had seen five open breasts on the altars of Mexico's gods.

A word from Moctezuma and the Aztec armies, equipped though they were with Stone Age weapons and quilted cotton

armor, could have swamped the invaders by sheer force of numbers. But Moctezuma, torn by indecision, continued to sacrifice to the gods and was silent.

Then one day, with that perfect timing which makes the sober historian of the Conquest feel as if he were fitting together the action of a play, Indians with ear and lip plugs of blue gems and gold approached the dune on which Bernal Díaz and a companion were stationed, watching clouds gather over Orizaba and the unknown mountains and thinking: "A hard journey and a long one to Tenochtitlán, made dangerous by enemies." "I told my comrade to stay at his post while I took the Indians into camp," Bernal Díaz writes, without facetiousness, "for at that time my feet did not hurt as they do now that I am old."

The visitors spoke a language which, although it belonged to the Mayan stock, was incomprehensible to Aguilar and Malinche. Two commanded enough Nahuatl, however, to let the girl know that they were secret agents from Cempoalla, the principal city of the Totonacs. They had been conquered (probably reconquered) but lately by the Aztecs and were resentful at having had to furnish sacrificial victims for the altars of Tenochtitlán. Their chief had heard of the strangers' victory in Tabasco and was extending them an invitation to visit him and take his people's part against the Aztecs.

Cortés pricked up his ears. "In a prolonged talk," continues Bernal Díaz, "Cortés was pleased to learn that Moctezuma had enemies and antagonists. He took leave of the messengers graciously, giving them presents and sending word to their chief that his invitation would soon be accepted. And now I shall leave this subject and tell you that on those sands where we were camped there were always many long-legged mosquitoes, as well as little ones called *xexenes* which are worse than the big ones, and we could get no sleep on account of them . . ."

This, Cortés' first intimation of the true state of affairs in Mexico, seems to have given him a second wind, for in quick

succession he brings off some of the famous strokes of diplomacy which certain historians have found so admirable.

First there is the army to be dealt with. Priming his friends, including the soldiers' idol, Pedro de Alvarado, he issues general orders to prepare for the return to Cuba. He, himself, and a few true Spanish cavaliers like Captain Alvarado, would prefer to stay and make their fortunes, but he will not lead men who accuse him of exceeding his authority. Immediately there is loud protest, in which some of the Velásquez faction join. But Cortés is adamant. The fleet sails next day. The men beg him not to let them down after bringing them this far. They too are anxious to establish a settlement wherever he thinks best. They will even take the first steps.

Bernal Díaz stands with the majority, although in retrospect he is disgruntled at the performance. "When he had his fill of coaxing Cortés gave in, on condition that we make him chief justice and captain general of the colony. But the worst of the concessions which we made to him was a promise of one fifth of all the gold that we might obtain, after the Crown's fifth had been deducted. Then we gave him all these very wide powers before a royal notary and proceeded to draw up plans and articles for the founding of a city, to be named the Rich City of the True Cross, because we had landed on Good Friday and because Puertocarrero had advised Cortés to look out for the rich lands."

Now Cortés alone would not have to answer for his acts, but the municipal officers of La Villa Rica de la Vera Cruz as well—and these had been elected by the army on its own initiative. Let them all think that over and see if it wasn't to their interest to back him against failure. The fleet goes to make a landing at the selected harbor while he himself, head high, leads the troops to Cempoalla.

(Vera Cruz was not moved to its present site until the seventeenth century.)

The Totonacs meet him on the road with pineapples. "Luscious," says Bernal Díaz, smacking his lips at the memory.



Cortés feasts with their fat chief, listens sympathetically to his grievances against the Aztecs and inquires about other dissatisfied provinces. There are many, he is told. And halfway to Tenochtitlán lies Tlaxcala, "Land of Corn," "Land of Plenty," the focus of resistance to the Aztecs. Tlaxcala. Cortés accustoms his tongue to the strength in the consonants of it.

On the way to the coast his new ally, who is accompanying him with four hundred porters, is thrown into a panic by an encounter with a delegation of Aztecs. Moctezuma has been angered by Cempoalla's reception of the strangers, they say, smelling roses, and demands twenty youths for sacrifice. Cortés coerces the Totonac to take the decisive step of assaulting and imprisoning the Aztecs. Word goes out: Only gods, *teules*, would dare think of such a thing. While the chiefs of the coastal towns are rushing in to be assured that the

Spaniards will stand between them and Moctezuma, Cortés secretly releases the Aztecs, expresses indignation at the way the Totonacs have treated them without his knowledge and hurries them off to Moctezuma with his protestations of friendship! In the nick of time. Moctezuma has just issued orders to sweep the Totonac country and bring back the abettors of the rebels. Mollified by Cortés' message, he countermands the orders and instead sends an embassy to the rapidly rising town of Vera Cruz. He is certain now that the Spaniards are Quetzalcoatl's people. Out of respect to them he will spare the Totonacs during their stay. But afterward . . .

"The Totonacs cannot serve two masters," Cortés answers. "But we'll discuss that when I get to Tenochtitlán."

The first block has been pried loose easily from the Aztec political pyramid. Cortés sinks all the ships except one, that one to carry Puertocarrero to Spain with enough gold to offset any bad reports the emperor may have received from Governor Velásquez. Then Cortés faces his soldiers, who are roaring in mutiny again. "No returning to Cuba now. Ahead lies Mexico." For a few minutes it is doubtful whether he is going to make himself heard. But he knows the magic word. "And ahead," he shouts, with a smile as winning as Pedro de Alvarado's, "lies Mexico's gold."

## CHAPTER VI

# Fiesta of the Flowers

"IT IS so much more difficult to judge these men when we see them at the same time cruel and debonair," writes Marcel Brion of the Spanish conquerors. "They massacred the natives and tortured them with the refinements of extraordinary perversion, yet they could be moved by the goodness of the captive Moctezuma, and treat him courteously. . . .

"They were little concerned with the suffering they imposed on the Indians because they paid little or no attention to their own sufferings, throwing themselves, sick or wounded, into whatever danger there was. Generous and grasping, foolhardy and wary, they reconciled in themselves all the contraries with a touching ingenuousness. Miguel de Unamuno has thrown perfect light on this dualism of the Spanish nature, the dualism Cervantes immortalized in the two heroes of his epic burlesque."

Certainly the most debonair of the *conquistadores*, one of the most wantonly cruel was Pedro de Alvarado. One can see ingenuousness in him, but by no stretch of the imagination could it be called touching, as was that of Bernal Díaz. In the letters which Alvarado wrote to Cortés during his conquest of Guatemala occur the usual expressions of piety; he was a faithful soldier of the church; he was close to Father Olmedo; but there is no evidence that he had much of the religious



mysticism which made Cortés the perfect expression of Spain's Golden Age. Therefore, since Alvarado was conspicuous in that company by his debonairness and by his cruelty I doubt whether he could be taken as a representative Spaniard of his period, even had he not been blond.

I should call this son of Badajoz a universal type, by no means complex, since his contraries were reconciled in his avarice. From beginning to end of his career in America he was the gold seeker. Mexican history falls into periods during which foreigners like him have come to make personal fortunes out of first one and then another of the country's resources: yellow gold, silver, green gold, black gold. The Mexican Revolution, in the last analysis, is a repudiation of these exploiters—yellow beards, blue eyes, smiles and all—and of the alien institutions which they brought with them.

A step to make this repudiation effective was the passage of the expropriation law of 1936, under which the president of Mexico is empowered to take any property required for *utilidad social*—"social usefulness." The law covers "elements susceptible of being exploited," "the equitable distribution of wealth cornered or monopolized for the exclusive benefit of one or several persons," "the creation of, encouragement to, or preservation of an enterprise for the benefit of the community." This law provides that property thus seized shall be paid for upon the basis of assessed valuation, and within a term of ten years.

Pursuant to it, President Lázaro Cárdenas ordered, during the course of 1937, expropriation of the Álamos school lands in the state of Chiapas, of the so-called National Railways of Mexico, of the Agua Caliente resort properties. On the night of March 18, 1938, he announced over the radio expropriation of properties of seventeen oil companies composed of citizens of the United States and Great Britain.

"They hold," he said, "that their economic strength and their pride shield them against the dignity and sovereignty of a nation that has with such liberality handed over to them

its enormous natural resources and that cannot, by legal means, obtain satisfaction of even the most rudimentary obligations. It therefore becomes unavoidable, as a logical consequence, to take final measures under our laws to put an end to this never-ending state of affairs under which the country labors, its industrial progress checked by those who hold in their own hands the power to throw all obstacles in its way, and the dynamic force of their activity, employing the same, not for noble and lofty ends, but for abuse of that economic strength, to such an extent as to jeopardize the very life of the nation that seeks to uplift its people by means of the enforcement of its own laws, by turning to account its own resources, and by freely managing its own destinies. . . .”

More than petroleum rights were at issue here. President Cárdenas was defying a ghostly parade of foreigners that reached straight back to Pedro de Alvarado.

Since five Alvarado brothers were with Cortés I used to think that I must be confusing the character of one with the acts of another. But it was Don Pedro of the sunny ways who crisscrossed Mexico with a brand distinguishable from all the rest because it was so inhumanly deep and because something of himself went in with the overheated iron and festered. To this day the healing is not complete. That is the reason for the *consciousness* of the man Alvarado which strikes visitors to modern Mexico as so unwarranted and which sends them to their guidebooks to see if the blond captain can have been of more importance than his commander.

Once Alvarado's two-sidedness is apparent, he becomes a sinister figure, a sort of fallen angel, and he exerts a perverse fascination. His armor in the National Museum is not stared at so long because of interest in its workmanship but because of the evidence which it gives as to the strength and symmetry of his body. People's eyes travel over it as if they expected to find blood rust or strands of a yellow beard. Other streets of Mexico City change their names but not El Puente de Alvarado. Students on their way from classes at the summer

school of the National University pause at the intersection of "Alvarado's Street" with Eliseo to reconstruct in their minds' eyes the scene at the broken bridge on *La Noche Triste*. Whatever history professors tell them to the contrary, they see the steel-clad captain hurtling through the night, a super-human athlete. Whether he or his descendants built the Casa de Alvarado in the suburb of Coyoacán, those who go straight from Cuauhtemoc's torture chamber to gaze at its mellowed façade of rose-colored stone are hardly thinking of the archaeological work which the late Mrs Zelia Nuttall carried on there or of the famous gardens within.

On murals that beard would make its owner an outstanding figure in any event; but art and propaganda being one here, the painter seems always to have lingered on the man who embodies all the evils of the Conquest and at the same time is from an esthetic viewpoint the most satisfying model among the conquerors. (I am thinking particularly of the fresco, *The Conqueror*, by José Clemente Orozco on the vaulted ceiling in the National Preparatory School.) On canvas Alvarado has had the sadist's face, lit by a coldly sensual glow; the soldier's, steel like his helmet; the blond beast's, muscular and sweat-streaked from labor at the harvest of canelike human necks.

Never smiling.

To find out what that famous smile was like, the smile of which Mexicans perhaps don't want to be reminded because it captivated them, one would have to have eyes to see Don Pedro swagger through the yellow marigolds some All Souls' Day, when the souls of the dead come back to enjoy the things they enjoyed in life. He is beaming then, never fear, for he knows that he still must be compared to the sun. Men may curse him, but they cannot forget him and they never take his name lightly.

He was smiling, I think, when he rode with Cortés through the Tlaxcalan wall on the first of September 1519. That had been a stiff climb up from the coast, one which they

could not have made had the hail and sleet which pelted them been stones and Aztec arrows, but Alvarado came through in fine fettle, mounted on his chestnut mare.

No Aztec flower war being in progress, the celebrated wall was unguarded, and it was the slaughter of the first group of natives which they met that gave the republic of Tlaxcala word that they were within its gates. The Tlaxcalan senate debated hotly what course to adopt. (Today one may stand on the side lines of that momentous session by viewing the painting by Rodrigo Gutiérrez which hangs in the Palace of Fine Arts in Mexico City.) Once resistance was decided on, the mountaineers lived up to their reputation as fighters, however confounded by horses, firearms and an unheard-of type of warfare in which the enemy's sole purpose was to kill. After four defeats, however, doubt set in as to the vinci-bility of beings like these. Parleys began, but Cortés broke them off by seizing fifty envoys who, according to Malinche, looked like spies. Cortés had them tortured until some admitted that they were, then the hands of the entire party were chopped off and they were sent back to Tlaxcala. Tlaxcala surrendered.

The price of peace was what the republic was all too ready to give: military aid against the Aztecs. So the recent unpleasantness was forgotten in the anticipation of evening up scores of sixty years standing and more. Tribes on friendly terms with the Tlaxcalans were drawn into the alliance. A pretender to the Texcocan throne came, seeking Cortés' support. Thereafter the conquest of Anáhuac was really a conquest by its Indian enemies led by the Spaniards.

Tlaxcala had little gold to covet, but she promised to be an effective instrument for getting the gold that lay just over the mountains. Those circumstances explain in part why the Tlaxcalans had cause only to adore Alvarado during the three weeks that the Spaniards spent recuperating and carousing there. Also he was in high animal spirits. Historians who have found it difficult to follow the thought processes which

led him to certain actions might have done better to put him for the purpose of study on a purely physical plane. The air of Tlaxcala is a tonic, its coolness tempered by sun, and breathing it after *tierra caliente* makes the sap run strong in a man. The Spaniards were astonished and contemptuous at finding barbershops and steam baths in this heathen town. If any of them invaded these places I'll wager it was the elegant captain. Lastly, the Tlaxcalans were ready with adoration. The name Tonatiuh became his here. In their ignorance of his power they had let themselves be stricken. Now they waited in awe to feel his next effects. In reality they warmed him. He grew expansive and smiled. They smiled back, infatuated, and the ring around him grew as he took off his helmet for them and shook his yellow locks in the sun.

The clean-limbed Tlaxcalan women met with his approval too, whereas he had been disdainful of the best that the Totonacs could offer. He delighted everyone by accepting the daughter of Xicotencatl, the highest-ranking leader, thus undertaking to give the Tlaxcalans what they were so eager to have, living tokens of his affection for them.

The true age of the *mestizo* was still far in the future, but the seeds of it were being planted by Alvarado and his mates. Complicating the dualism which makes *mestizos* were the two passions in which they were conceived: love and enmity.

A symbol of the first is the husbandly smile with which Alvarado, as Tonatiuh the life-giving, went to the couch of straw mats where the Tlaxcalan was waiting—as Malinche waited for Cortés, as women waited for every Spaniard. The chiefs of Tlaxcala were vying with one another to get their daughters mated with these strange new allies of theirs "so that if by good fortune they became pregnant there should remain among the Tlaxcalans the offspring of men so brave and fearful." Two children were born to Alvarado and Doña Luisa, as she was renamed at baptism. They went, with apparently little emotional conflict, into the world of their father, the daughter at least marrying into one of the noblest Spanish

families. The urge to paternity, which becomes increasingly discernible in Alvarado, does him credit, although the cynic may ask whether with him, as with many a man in every day and age, fatherhood does not mean merely an expanding of the ego. The union made him a patron, liege lord—father, in short, to Tlaxcala; and Tlaxcala, always filial, found him indulgent. In the cedar-beamed Church of San Francisco on the hill above the city one is still shown the fount where he stood as godfather to Xicotencatl at the latter's baptism in 1520. Since the Tlaxcalans have always been on the defensive against the charge of treachery to Mexico, a somewhat different attitude with regard to Don Pedro may be expected in this, the most reduced state of the republic. I have wondered if one might not discover survivals, in folklore or fiestas, of that old hugging of an ideal.

(Elsewhere in Mexico Alvarado appears in the Feather Dance, a tragic re-enactment of the Conquest, as the bearer of manacles.)

Shock is the symbol of the other passion in which a new Mexico was generated: that of October 1519 when a musket gave the signal for the rape of defenseless Cholula; that of May 1520, when Tenochtitlán hurled herself in fury upon blood-spattered Alvarado, the despoiler of corpses.

Cholula, the Holy City of Anáhuac, enjoyed a degree of autonomy under Aztec influence. Its inhabitants received the Spaniards hospitably, but Malinche, spying among the women, heard a rumor that Moctezuma was preparing to resist further invasion. Cortés ordered the principal citizens to come unarmed into the courtyard of the *teocalli*. Then he turned his men loose upon them. The Cholulans, recalling Quetzalcoatl's promise to send out a flood to aid them in an hour of need, ran to the pyramid and began tearing at its walls. Dust and plaster only fell into their faces while Spanish lances pinned them one by one to the winged-serpent friezes. Then Spaniards joined Tlaxcalans and Cempoallans in the sack of the city and the army, with more gold in its craw, moved up

through the pass between the volcanoes and down upon Tenochtitlán.

Moctezuma had had a warning. Its effect was not lost upon Alvarado when Moctezuma met them in state on the southern approach to Tenochtitlán and welcomed them to "their city," which had been waiting so many centuries for their coming "from out of the clouds and mists, from out of a place in the east curtained to mortal eyes."

"An immense stone flower in the center of the lake," is Alfonso Reyes' description of Tenochtitlán as the Spaniards saw it on the morning of November eighth. Three smooth causeways, as wide as two lances, connected it with the mainland. That of Ixtapalapan, today the Churubusco Road, extended from the south straight through the heart of the city and became the causeway to the hill of Tepeyac, now the Calzada de Guadalupe. From Tlacopan on the west another entered the city as a street that joined the principal one at the central square, the familiar Zócalo. Each causeway was defended by a gate and numerous drawbridges, which more than one Spaniard must have eyed uneasily as they crossed. Many of the side streets were canals, spanned by bridges. The better houses were of *tezontli*, one-storied as a rule, with intricate carvings of fruits and grains and plumed serpents on their façades. Every roof was a garden, every patio a garden, and the florist of the United States will read his indebtedness to Mexico in the list of flowers which bloomed there: yellow and orange marigolds, dahlias, zinnias, amaryllis, salvias, lantanas, bouvardias, flaming poinsettias.

Flowers even floated over the lake, together with trees and orderly rows of vegetables and light straw and cane houses, for the Xochimilcans had continued to build raft gardens, *chinampas*, displaying the same virtuosity, the same association of beauty with uniqueness, that made Aztec artists cut the hardest gems, carve the most minute surfaces, flake difficult obsidian; that made Moctezuma wage a distant jungle war for the rare flower of Yucucane.

Bernal Díaz, writing of the destruction of that city that looked as if it were "enchanted," could never have understood the assertion that, just as he and his companions-at-arms failed to eradicate those flowers, so they failed to destroy Tenochtitlán. It remained as a beautiful consoling memory, an Aztec Tula, and that memory could never fade because—literally—Tenochtitlan has kept coming up out of the ground. The National Museum is crammed with its fragments. The digging of a well or the laying of a sewer in Mexico City has always resembled the excavation of archaeologists. A block to the northeast of the massive sagging cathedral, construction of a government building was abandoned when workmen uncovered a portion of the great *teocalli* of Huitzilopochtli and Tlaloc. Now a huge stone serpent bares his fangs at streetcars and taxis, more truly a monument to the Revolution than any the Revolution has erected. In 1926, while repairs were being made on the National Palace, a stone model of the five-tiered pyramid was unearthed. On it was carved the face of the sun, recalling the old prophecy: "When the great *teocalli* of Tenochtitlán shall reappear in the central plaza, with the sun upon it, then shall the Indians possess their ancient rights."

The very stones of Tenochtitlán went into the building of Mexico City. The cathedral and National Palace not only occupy the sites of the *teocalli* and Moctezuma's palace; the old structures form part of the newer. At the start of the congested Calle de Tacuba, where the street from the Tlacopan causeway reached the western entrance of the *teocalli*, are the stones of the palace of Axayacatl, Moctezuma's father.

"They took us to lodge in this palace," we learn from Bernal Díaz, "because Moctezuma had many temples of his idols there; since they called us *teules*, considering us divine, he wanted us among his other gods. Great halls and rooms, hung with tapestries, had been prepared for our captain, and for each of us beds of straw mats with canopies, the best they could have furnished for any lord, no matter how



great. The entire palace was spick and span, whitewashed and swept and decorated with garlands of flowers. And Moctezuma had there a secret chamber full of pieces of gold and gold jewelry, the treasure which he had inherited from his father and which he never touched. . . ."

The Spaniards detected the sealed entrance at once and tore down the wall.

Next they kidnaped Moctezuma. Cortés, Alvarado and four others walked boldly into his palace, gave him to understand through Malinche that resistance meant death and took him back to their stronghold. They installed him in comfortable quarters with his own attendants; they made a show of paying him his accustomed deference, but they broke him completely. The last turn of the screw came when a governor killed some pillaging Spaniards from Vera Cruz. Moctezuma, having obediently summoned the guilty parties to Tenochtitlán, sat in irons while Cortés burned the governor, his son and fifteen nobles in the courtyard. The fetters were removed then.

Moctezuma was not an old man, being about forty, and up until the fatal year One Reed he had shown as much backbone as any of his predecessors. But meekly and with tears in his eyes he swore allegiance to the king of Spain. For the next six months he was the automaton through whom Cortés ruled Anáhuac. So thoroughly was respect for Moctezuma's office instilled into his subjects that at a word from him potential leaders of resistance, including his brother, Cuiclahuac, stepped into Spanish chains. He arranged the treacherous seizure of Cacama, the Texcocoan ruler.

Cortés was furnished with maps showing the locations of the principal gold mines. Spaniards accompanied the Aztec tax collectors, appropriating the precious metals and jewels. Goldsmiths were summoned from Atzacapotzalco and set to work melting down Axayacatl's treasure: the ornaments and images on which their fathers had expended all their skill. The value of that hoard has been estimated at 700,000 gold

dollars, yet when the Crown's fifth and Cortés' fifth had been deducted, when Cortés had dipped in for expense money and his favorite officers for their emoluments, so small was the share of the common soldiers that some are said to have fallen ill from chagrin.

The smart ones stroked the goose that so readily laid golden eggs.

That aspect of Moctezuma's captivity makes his fate an infinitely more degrading one than that of the dedicated youth who impersonated Tezcatlipoca. Knowing that he had forfeited the respect of his subjects, he sought desperately to compensate himself with the good will of these captors who called themselves his friends. He showered them one and all with gifts. Bernal Díaz was one of his guards and got three gold bars, two loads of cotton mantles and a beautiful bed companion for being considerate enough to bare his head in Moctezuma's presence. The captains fared best, especially Alvarado, whose company did more than anything else to cheer Moctezuma. They took him hunting on the state preserves, closely guarded of course, and walked with him through Chapultepec Park, where he had a summer home. Finding that he liked a certain game, in which a golden ball was thrown at a golden target, Cortés and Alvarado often played with him for stakes of gold and jewels. Bernal Díaz reminisces how Moctezuma always gave his winnings to the guard.

"I remember one day when Cortés was playing against Pedro de Alvarado and the great Moctezuma against a nephew of his. Alvarado always won over Cortés by a point. Seeing this, Moctezuma said jokingly and very graciously that he did not want Tonatiuh, as he called Alvarado, to take Cortés' stake because there was much *ixoxol* in his scoring. This meant in his language that Alvarado was cheating. And Cortés and all of us guards could not help laughing at the word which Moctezuma used, because, genteel as he was in person and manner, Pedro de Alvarado was foul mouthed."

Did the captain, with the chain of gold and the gold spurs which he had had the Atzacapotzalco smiths make for him, cheat for a bit of gold or must he be bowed to even in a game?

Even the effect on Alvarado of a heady Mexican spring becomes important now, for he is left master of life and death in Tenochtitlán, in command of 140 Spaniards and the Tlaxcalans, while Cortés leads the rest of the army down to Vera Cruz to meet a force sent by the governor of Cuba to arrest him. Unfortunately Cortés takes Bernal Díaz, but the latter's testimony would have had to be incontrovertible indeed to quash the indictment that stands against Alvarado.

It was the fifth month in the Aztec calendar, Toxcatl, the time of Tezcatlipoca's sad sacrifice and the consequent happy rebirth of the flowers, a fiesta corresponding so closely to Passion Week and Easter that friars were to wonder what figure baptized Indians really saw on the cross. On the same occasion Huitzilopochtli was honored with the sacrifice of a youthful impersonator and with an image made of amaranth seed flour, which was carried in a procession to the *teocalli* and there broken and eaten. "In the temple courtyard," writes Sahagún, "all the nobles and warriors, old and young, joined in a serpentine dance, like the popular dances of old Castile. . . . This manner of dancing they call *tlanaua*, meaning 'embraced,' embracing Huitzilopochtli, that is. All this was done with great modesty and decorousness; anyone guilty of an improper word or look was punished, for they had persons on the watch for this." Huitzilopochtli's living image "danced with the others in this fiesta and in the common dances went ahead, guiding; of his own free will and at the moment he chose he placed himself in the hands of the priests who were to kill him. . . ."

Pedro de Alvarado gave a delegation of Aztecs permission to hold this fiesta in the patio of the great *teocalli*, provided that the sacrifice be eliminated and that all the participants come unarmed. Sahagún, after inquiring closely into the matter among the Aztecs, states unequivocally that Alvarado

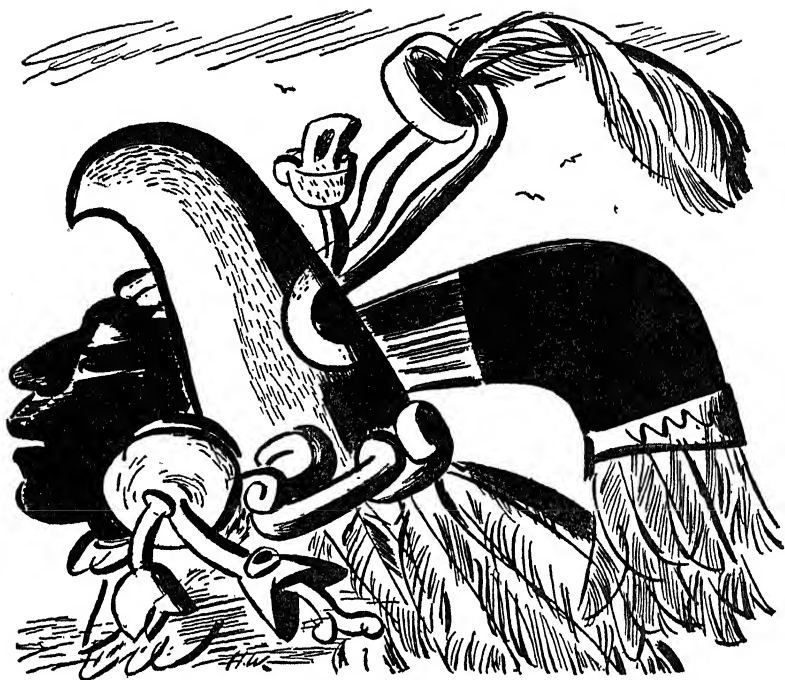
urged Moctezuma to have the festival held as usual, saying that the Spaniards would like to see it. At least the captain knew that he was bringing together the principal men of Tenochtitlán in all their finery, including gold ornaments.

On May nineteenth they assembled, to the number of more than six hundred, gaudy in feathers and jewels and decked with flowers. The presence of Tonatiuh and his armed followers at the gates in the Wall of Serpents aroused no suspicions.

The Spaniards waited, as at Cholula, for a signal. What tugged most powerfully at the undevious, steel-plated, rotten-cored captain as he gave it? The determination to bring another people to heel as he had brought the Tlaxcalans? Petulance at being cooped up in the springtime? Panic, as has recently been suggested? Simply gold lust, Mexico has always believed, and no one has been able to gainsay her.

"While the Aztecs were dancing and singing in a circle the Spaniards closed all the exits and rushed into the patio. Surrounding the dancers, they began by cutting the musicians to pieces. Then they attacked the rest with lances and swords, piercing backs, lopping off or splitting open heads. The stomachs of some they ripped open; and these ran wildly, dragging their entrails, looking for escape. Those who approached the gates were struck down. A few climbed the walls. Some took refuge in the temple. Many fell among the corpses and pretended to be dead, but once one of these moved a little he was seen and killed. The blood of the nobility flowed like rain water, so the patio was like a slippery plain, strewn with heads, arms, intestines, and reeking with the stench. The Spaniards searched everywhere to see if any were hidden, going through the temples and prodding among the corpses with their lances. . . . And then the Spaniards stripped the dead of their ornaments."

The city rose.



## CHAPTER VII

### Noche Triste

TENOCHTITLÁN rose. "Barbed arrows, three-toothed javelins, darts with wide obsidian heads: like a great yellow cloud the reed missiles covered the Spaniards."

Not from lack of courage had the Aztecs endured so much. In spite of the Spanish alliance with Tlaxcala, in spite of the massacre at Cholula, most of Anáhuac had received these strangers with a stirring of hope. They might exact an offering of blood and still prove messiahs. The Spaniards had

burned Aztec officials at the stake, but Mexico knew the cruel side of gods. Although the Aztec pantheon was so crowded that Tezcatlipoca had begun to take over the functions of some of the superfluous deities, the Christian Mary fitted in easily among the fertility goddesses, "the fact being," explains Father Motolinia, "that as they had a hundred idols they were willing to have a hundred and one."

"Many are of the opinion," wrote another priest, "that if the Spaniards had continued the course they began they might easily have disposed of Moctezuma and his kingdom, and introduced the law of Christ, without much bloodshed."

When the Spaniards invaded the great *teocalli*, smashed Huitzilopochtli's image and put up one of Mary, the Aztecs had not been able to understand how a goddess could sanction such incivility. (I believe that expresses their thought exactly and I wonder how much tolerance is worth in weighing the merits of a religion.) The Mexican Indian has always lacked personal aggressiveness, however, and any flare of resentment at the highhanded proceedings of the visitors had been checked by the seizure of Moctezuma. Since he professed to accept these beings as the destined rulers of the land his subjects had stood in suspense, watching.

Slowly and sickeningly had come realization of what these so-called *teules* were really after: the excrement of the gods. Not for its beauty when worked into jewelry, but for the yellow stuff itself. To pile it up and pat it and gloat over it with such absorption was ugly, offensive, the work of beetles!

Then the massacre. It is possible that the Aztecs might have borne that senseless chastisement at the hands of Tonatiuh, as they would have borne sunstroke, had Alvarado not disappointed them more than any of the others. We cannot catch the magnetism of the man now, but it was there undoubtedly. Even without the yellow aura of mystery which surrounded him, I venture to say that Aztecs as well as Tlaxcalans would have found him, at his best, *simpático*, to use a priceless and untranslatable word of today. He knew how

to behave elegantly too, *correctamente*. Indian appreciation of refinement is keen now. It was probably keener then. Some overt act would be required to make the Indian see that the refinement was only superficial, for one of his fundamental traits is concentration on how a person conducts himself and indifference to how that person feels or thinks. Also, Alvarado laughed, and Anáhuac was in need of laughter. If Quetzalcoatl *was* some roving Leif or Eric one might safely take some of Don Pedro's qualities for his picture. But this Quetzalcoatl was more rabid a gold hunter than any of his fellows. And finally he led them to rob corpses. . . .

The disillusioned Aztecs rose in a fury which for intensity and singleness of purpose has never been equaled in their history. And what fanned that fury white hot was shame at themselves for having been ready to put faith in mere men—and in the most contemptible of men at that.

They have never forgotten. One of the commonest complaints of foreigners and white Mexicans is that Indians and *mestizos* are habitually suspicious, *desconfiados*. (Indians in a community trust one another and are very earnest in their desire for town solidarity. *Mestizo* seldom trusts *mestizo* because each has in him the blood of mutually distrustful races.) The experiences of four hundred years have only served to fix the lesson of May 1520. I have learned (I hope) never to prophesy the course of events in Mexico. I do know this, however. Dr Krum Heller and his Nazi propagandists are going to make no headway among the *Indians* of Mexico by magically changing their ancestors' hair to yellow and eyes to blue.

One more point. It is no easy matter to keep from getting confused, among so many Mexican revolutions, as to when the Revolution began. Francisco Madero called for a general insurrection against the Díaz dictatorship on November 20, 1910. On September 16, 1810, Father Hidalgo gave the Cry of Dolores for independence from Spain. Take another step back into history and say that the Revolution commenced

on May 19, 1520, with the flight of the first arrow after Pedro de Alvarado had stooped in that slaughterhouse of his own making to yank a gold earring from a dead man.

Yet even then the Aztecs let themselves be balked. Alvarado forced Moctezuma to appear on the roof and order a cessation of the attack. Arrows stopped in mid-air, as someone expresses it, and his subjects compromised on a blockade of the Spanish quarters. Cortés, arriving with reinforcements of the Cuban army, which he had won over by gold and the promise of gold, found his captain bruised and hungry, but smiling. On being taken to task for endangering their position, Alvarado lightly made the excuse that he had felt trouble brewing and had struck to intimidate the Aztecs. Cortés called him a liar. When he turned his anger on Moctezuma, however, he let it be known that he stood behind his officer. Alvarado had merely killed a pack of dogs. Cuitlahuac was released, with orders to see that peace was restored and food brought without delay. Otherwise the city would have another taste of Alvarado's treatment.

Within the hour the drawbridges were raised and the attack was resumed, under the leadership of Cuitlahuac and a nephew of his and Moctezuma's, young Cuauhtemoc. When Cortés sent Moctezuma again upon the roof cries of "Woman!" greeted him, and a stone knocked him senseless. His usefulness was ended. The Aztecs found his body in the street one morning. He had died from that blow, the Spaniards said. He must have got those marks on his neck (marks like those of a man who has been garroted) when they dumped him over the wall.

Cortés was disembarassing himself of impedimenta, for he saw that his position was no longer tenable and that he must fall back on Tlaxcala. The first hour of July first was set for the departure, the route over the lake to be the shortest, the two miles of the Tlacopan causeway. But the Spaniards faced tragedy before they started. They couldn't possibly carry all the gold. Cortés' fifth and most of the Crown's, cast



into ingots, was loaded on horseback. Yet heaps remained. "I turn it over to you," said Cortés to his men, "rather than let these Mexican dogs have it." They stayed until the last minute, cramming gold into wallets and boxes and into their armor. At midnight they staggered out into the drizzling rain.

*La Noche Triste*, the Spaniards were to call the hours until dawn, because of their losses. The Sad Night, the Night of Sorrows. The adjective, *triste*, however, holds the quality of the night itself, of almost any night on the plateau at the height of the rainy season. Dismal, mournful, melancholy. Slow night rains bear no resemblance to the warm hearty showers that pound down briefly every afternoon. It is cold, although there is never ice in the air. There is no wind and no agitation in the rain. It should be gentle and soporific, but it isn't. It makes for brooding and for weeping in one's beer. The individual who finds himself tramping the streets of Mexico City on such a night—and a Mexican has observed that "a town, like a woman, should be known at night"—should start at the corner of Tacuba and La República del Brasil and follow for a ways the westward retreat of the Spaniards. At no other time will that old causeway loom so plainly between the trees of the Alameda and the deserted stalls of the flower market on the Avenida Hidalgo. Flooded gutters become canals. The rain glistens under the street lights like long spent arrows. . . .

The Aztecs never fought after dark, so the Spaniards and their allies were able to make their way undetected to the spot where the street opened on the causeway. There, where the Italianate Central Post Office of Porfirio Díaz' day now stands, was the first of the three gaps to be spanned by the portable bridge which Cortés had had constructed. The crossing was being made in good order when the Spaniards heard a cry. A woman, coming out to draw water, had seen them. A true Aztec, she hurled her torch at them.

Shouts and conch shells carried the alarm to the *teocalli*, where priests started beating the great snakeskin drum, "a

drum of doleful sound which could be heard for two or three leagues." Before the van, under Captain Sandoval, reached the second break in the causeway, canoes were swarming over the lake and the attack was on from all sides. The cavalry galloped ahead, to be halted by the water. The horses reared and slipped as Aztecs hacked at their legs. Men, pushing and trampling over the dead and wounded, slipped. Weighted with gold, many sank before they could be dragged into Aztec canoes. Men fought with chests of gold under their left arms and died, clutching their gold. Then panic spread from the rear where Alvarado and Velásquez de León were in command. The bridge had been jammed and could not be raised. The saints of Spain were yelled at. Baggage and artillery, prisoners and Tlaxcalans, Spaniards and gold: everything was shoved pell-mell into the breach until it was filled and the center could cross on the groaning mass. The Church of San Hipólito commemorates the Christians who died there.

The last gap is the one made famous by Alvarado; judging by the publicity which he received, no happening of that night is so important as the manner of his crossing. It is not clear whether talk began to the credit or discredit of the captain. In the former event it may have originated with his Tlaxcalans, who afterward gave the most startling version of the incident. According to them, Alvarado, after the chestnut mare had been killed under him, stood wounded and alone on the brink while the Aztecs closed in on him. At the last moment he planted his lance in the wreckage at the bottom of the lake and vaulted across. Aztecs and Tlaxcalans were struck by amazement. "His friends prostrated themselves in homage to such a heroic, frightful and extraordinary feat, one which they had never seen a man perform. They ate handfuls of earth and pulled up grass, crying that truly this was the son of the Sun."

Bernal Díaz scoffs at this. He took the trouble later to investigate the depth of the water and the width of the break in the causeway and, although neither he nor anyone else

ever gives the measurements, he declares emphatically that a vault would have been a physical impossibility. He dismisses the testimony of those claiming to have been eyewitnesses with the remark that every man was too full of concern for his own life to stop and watch what was going on behind him. At the same time he grows indignant at the accusation that Alvarado left Velásquez de León and the remnants of the rear guard to die.

In 1529, when the *conquistadores* had lost much of their prestige and Alvarado in particular had made himself disliked by his arrogance, he had to face trial on this charge of desertion. "As I was leaving the city my men forsook me," he testified. "That was why the enemy killed them, in the same way that they gave me an ugly wound and killed my horse. . . . But I did all that I could to captain them, until I found myself alone with my wound and my dead horse. That being my condition, I crossed the ditch on a single beam that remained. You should not hold my act against me nor throw it in my face, for it was a miracle that I escaped at all. I could not have done so, had it not been for a horseman who took me on his croup and got me clear."

He was acquitted. The spot had been named Salto de Alvarado, however, and Alvarado's Leap it has remained.

Just as immortalized is the story that an *ahuehuete* tree still standing in Popotla, where the causeway reached the mainland, sheltered Cortés while he wept as his shattered army filed by him at dawn. The likely place for tears was the pyramid which later gave way to the Church of the Virgin of the Remedies, in memory of the day's rest which her solicitude gave the Spaniards there.

In this crisis their fate depended on Tlaxcala, which they gained after beating off an Aztec attack at Otumba. Tlaxcala was steadfast in her friendship, rejecting a conciliatory offer of the Aztecs over the protests of Xicotencatl's son, one of the few who had no illusions about the Spaniards. They talked of religion, he said, but their one god was gold.

Reinforcements came to Cortés: Spaniards from Cuba and more seceding Aztec subjects than he could regiment. The Tlaxcalans helped build brigantines, to be carried in pieces over the mountains and reassembled on Lake Texcoco. At Christmas time Cortés marched again upon Tenochtitlán.

The most terrible of allies had preceded him: smallpox, brought from Cuba by a Negro slave. Cempoalla, first Mexican city to receive the white man, was the first to be struck. Then the epidemic swept through Tlaxcala and across the country, its mortality heightened by the adherence of the Indians to their custom of daily bathing. It raged for two months in Tenochtitlán, one of the victims being Cuitlahuac, who had been elected ruler at Moctezuma's death. His successor was Cuauhtemoc.

"Young, daring, brave and patriotic, the new ruler threw himself into the task of putting Mexico in a state of defense against the Spaniards," Mexican school children are taught in a book called *Historia Patria Mexicana*. "Energetically he sought alliances, stored up food, erected new fortifications and repaired the old ones . . . Cuauhtemoc means 'Falling Eagle.' By a remarkable coincidence, in the reign of one bearing this name the Aztec monarchy fell and with it the nation whose symbol was the legendary eagle, the eagle whose appearance was responsible for the foundation of Tenochtitlán. It fell, yes, but nobly and grandly, causing the admiration of the conquerors."

The admiration of the conquerors . . .

Tenochtitlán fell piecemeal, house by house, square by square, but its inhabitants never learned to fight as their destroyers were fighting. While defending themselves they tried to carry on a flower war. Cortés himself was captured at Xochimilco. He was rescued by a Tlaxcalan while the Aztecs were attempting to get him safely away and to an altar of Huitzilopochtli.

The invaders entered over the corpses of men and women whom Bernal Díaz seems to have thought of only as stiff-

necked. "All the houses were full of dead Indians. The soil of the entire city was broken, where they had pulled up grass by the roots, to cook and eat it. They had even gnawed the bark off the trees. We found no fresh water, only salt. No other race in the history of the world has suffered such hunger and thirst and kept up such a prolonged struggle."

The Spaniards had to cover their noses with cloths, Sahagún adds, but they plundered as they went. "Everywhere, in streets and houses, the Spaniards looked for gold. Quetzal feathers and turquoises they scorned. They caught the prettiest women and those of light complexion; to keep from being attacked women put mud on their faces and dressed in ragged clothing. The Spaniards chose the strongest men and youths for their slaves, branding them at once about the mouth or marking them temporarily."

On August 13, 1521, Cuauhtemoc was captured and the city's resistance was at an end. "I have done all that I could to fulfill my duty to my people and to defend my city," the Aztec said when brought before Cortés. "Take that dagger from your belt and kill me." Cortés refused, promising that his prisoner would be treated with the respect that his courage deserved. There was the matter of gold, however. The Spaniards were disappointed in the amount found. Where was the great treasure of Moctezuma? Where was the gold that had been left behind on *La Noche Triste*? Cuauhtemoc refused to say. At Cortés' headquarters in Coyoacán, he and Tetelepanquetzal, the ruler of Tlacopan, were put to the torture.

Here is one of the greatest of the mockings at death which illuminate for Mexico the dark pages of her history. Izaguirre's painting has been reproduced on the stamps of the republic. The scene is engraved on a tablet on the monument in the Paseo de la Reforma which is dedicated to "the memory of Cuauhtemoc and those warriors who fought heroically in defense of their country, MDXXI." On top of the basalt shaft Cuauhtemoc in bronze brandishes a spear. At the base are the names of Cuitlahuac, Cacama, the Texcocoan

ruler who died a prisoner of the Spaniards on *La Noche Triste*; his successor, Coanacoch; and Tetlepanquetzal. (Look for Moctezuma's name on a beer bottle.) On August 21, the anniversary of the torture, Aztecs in pre-Conquest dress assemble there to perform the old dances and to recall the words of Cuauhtemoc when his fellow sufferer groaned while his feet were being basted with oil and roasted over live coals: "Do you think that I am reveling in my bath?"

The only statement which fire forced out of Cuauhtemoc was that much of the gold had been thrown into the lake. Divers explored the bottom but found little. Tetlepanquetzal agreed to show where he had some gold buried in the grounds of his palace. Pedro de Alvarado had him tossed into a litter and carried to Tlacopan. There the cripple begged for death, saying that he had no gold and had made the confession only in the hope of dying on the road.

In 1525, while marching to put down a secessionist movement among the Spaniards in Honduras, Cortés hung Cuauhtemoc and Tetlepanquetzal ignominiously, charging that they had conspired to massacre their captors. Bernal Díaz says that Cortés' act "was most unjust, and was thought wrong by all of us who were on that expedition."

This probably occurred somewhere in the jungles of Chiapas, but legend persistently associates Cuauhtemoc's death with Oaxaca. Guides there insist that Cortés and his punitive force rested under the great cypress at Tule, which was well along in years at that time, it is true. Some go so far as to say that Cuauhtemoc was hung from a branch of that tree, although it is certain that a huge ceiba was used as a gallows.

Now Oaxaca is asserting more strongly than ever that she is the guardian of Cuauhtemoc's ashes. This southern state is the center of archaeological interest in Mexico at present, largely due to the work of Dr Alfonso Caso at Monte Albán.

"Behold a whole mountain transformed by the hand of man," writes Dr Caso, much as he talks. "A city in which temple after temple rises upon terrace after terrace, and gi-

gantic stairways lead to buildings so enormous that they would seem to have been erected for gods rather than men. Hundreds of tombs where one may unearth anything from the humble tools and implements buried with an artisan or farmer, to richest artifacts of jade or massive gold, pearls brought all the way from the Pacific Ocean, amber and jet, rock crystal that absorbed a lifetime in the polishing, or corals and conchs, covered with turquoise or jade mosaics. A city covering an area of twenty-four square miles, built on a mountain overlooking the valley of Oaxaca from a height of over thirteen hundred feet. This is Monte Albán."

Things as yet unexplained have come to light at Monte Albán: hieroglyphics that cannot be deciphered by any of the keys to the writings so far known in Mexico or Central America; the "Dancing People," relief sculptures on stones torn from some far older building, no one knows whose. All these human figures have bodily deformities: heads flat or extraordinarily elongated, bent or twisted feet. Some bear curious resemblance to Negroes. Some are unquestionably hermaphrodites. "Was it the intent to ridicule certain enemies?" wonders Dr Caso. "Or should we see in these sculptures a representation of the sick who came to a temple in which there was a god who performed miraculous cures? Could Monte Albán have been at one time a kind of Lourdes?"

When Pedro de Alvarado ravaged Oaxaca in 1521, leaving men to establish the town of Antequera, now Oaxaca City, on the banks of the Atoyac River, the Mixtecs had been on the point of destroying the Zapotec power. For some reason Mixtec dead were being buried in Zapotec tombs. One tomb of that period opened by Dr Caso contained jewels with the insignia of a falling eagle. In order that a historical cycle may be rounded out with the precision that Mexicans love, it is to be hoped that this is the burial place of the Aztec Cuauhtemoc and not that of some Oaxacan chief with the Mixtec or Zapotec equivalent of his name.

Moctezuma's official regalia was sent by Cortés as spoils

of war to his Hapsburg emperor. Three and a half centuries later the Austrian Hapsburgs restored the Aztec "scepter" to the land where one of the family was trying to rule. It was intended as a peace offering, but an Indian of Oaxaca, Benito Juárez, had taken up the lost cause of Cuauhtemoc and the penalty for the deeds of Cortés and Pedro de Alvarado had to be paid by blue-eyed Maximilian, whose "smooth and noble brow was like a blank page untouched by sorrow and whose long and parted beard flowed upon his chest like a river in golden splendor."





## CHAPTER VIII

# Gold: Yellow, Green and Black

"THE land belongs to him who works it with his hands."

The expropriation law of 1936 merely put into effect provisions of Article 27 of the constitution of 1917, and that article in turn was an expression of the fundamental Mexican tenet sung by Nezahualcoyotl in the fifteenth century.

Not that there is anything peculiarly Mexican about Mexican concepts of property in land. In 1492 Amerindian life from Cape Horn to Bering Sea was characterized by communal ownership of real estate, based on the family group. We of the United States need not look outside our own boundaries to see what happened when the indigenous system

was disrupted by roughshod conquerors and the foreign principle of individual property imposed. Yet today, when a commissioner of Indian affairs encourages Indian tribes to return to a degree of communal organization, politicians, missionaries and others with axes to grind raise the cry of Russian influence!

Ironically, in view of the fact that Mexico is now the standard bearer of Indianism, the Aztecs were probably the only Indians who evolved for themselves the concept of full private property. Instances of its application were rare, and today of only academic importance, but they may be found in the granting of estates by some of the rulers to individuals as rewards for their services or as a means of gaining their support. Thus by the time of the last Moctezuma there had been formed a small landed aristocracy, whose property was both hereditary and alienable.

The foundation stones of the Aztec social system, however, were the *calpulli*, geographical clans which had probably been based originally on kinship. In Tenochtitlán the *calpulli* were composed of the "first families" of the Aztecs and of the tribes which had attached themselves to the latter at the time of their settlement on the lake. Twenty in number, they were offshoots of the four tribal divisions which had formed wards of the city at its foundation. After the Spanish conquest these wards became the *barrios* of San Juan, San Pablo, San Sebastián and Santa María la Redonda, names which have not been lost during Mexico City's many transformations.

Cities and large towns in the Nahua area had similar divisions, proportionately fewer in number, while outside these centers the village was one *calpulli*.

Each *calpulli* had its own elective chief, its own god, its own courts and judges, its own military organization. Members of each held land in common. Part of this was worked by all to provide taxes and to keep up the temples and priests. The rest was apportioned among the families according to their requirements, with ownership remaining in the *calpulli*.

Land could not be sold or transferred. If it went untilled for a period of two years or if the family to which it had been assigned died out or changed residence, it reverted to the community. Land kept under regular cultivation was for all practical purposes family property. It passed from generation to generation and all its produce was the cultivators' to dispose of as they wished.

Scratch a Mexican god, it has been said, and you will find nature. Gods of rain, of growing plants, of the actual soil: that entire confusing pantheon was merely the land under various aspects. Labor being the only title to possession of a field, labor itself became a rite, like that of priests in toiling up pyramid steps. The produce of land and labor, whether maize or pottery fashioned out of the earth, partook of the sacrosanct.

In order to maintain contact with divinity, priests had to stay in the temples, laymen on the land. We have a pre-Conquest incantation in which a deer hunter, about to break his tie with his *milpa* by a brief absence, invites it to accompany him. "Come with me, O Father!" Traders, who made extended journeys far into Chiapas and Tabasco and penetrated even to Guatemala, had particular need of dispensation. Before setting out, on a lucky day, they made offerings to the earth. The staff which each carried was regarded as the image of the god, Yacatecuhtli, patron of merchants. On his return each man replaced his staff in the *calpulli* temple, with offerings of food, flowers, copal incense.

No crime brought severer punishment upon an Aztec than trespass. A hungry man might help himself to two or three ears of corn in a *milpa* without being considered a thief; if he took a larger quantity or wantonly destroyed plants he was summarily executed.

Sahagún tells how Moctezuma, hunting birds alone in his summer gardens on the edge of Tenochtitlán, killed one, then strolled on, looking with pleasure at the ripening maize.

Admiring a double ear on a stalk, he cut it off and went to the house of the owner to show it to him. Finding no one at home, he turned away. But the farmer, who had been watching at a distance, met Moctezuma as if by accident on the path. Bowing low, he said: "Lord, how is it that you, who are so powerful, take two ears of corn—*steal* them—when you have made a law that the theft of one ear or its equivalent means death? You break your own law?"

Moctezuma held out the maize, saying: "Take it back; it is yours."

"My lord," replied the farmer, "what I say I do not say for the sake of the corn itself. My field, myself, my wife and sons are yours. I have but spoken to make a good saying."

"No," said Moctezuma. "If you will not have the corn then take my mantle." Removing the garment, which was worked with blue gems, he pressed it upon the farmer.

Deeply embarrassed, the latter finally accepted the cape, saying: "Lord, I take it, and shall put it away for you."

Aztec life was static, its symbol the boundary post, fixed deep in the earth, ornamental to the earth, immovable under pain of death. The Spaniards came dynamically, like a swollen mountain stream, shattering all termini and sweeping men from their fields, the fields from under men. Not by killing, torturing and pillaging did they make their rule intolerable, so that the attitude of *el indio triste*, grieving himself to death, is the attitude of the time, but by violating—with the *encomienda* system—the relationship between the Indian and the land.

After the fall of Tenochtitlán slave labor replaced the sword as the means of getting quick wealth. Cortés wrote to his emperor "that the superior capacity of the Indians in New Spain had made him regard it as a grievous thing to condemn them to servitude, as had been done in the islands. But, on further trial, he had found the Spaniards so much harassed and impoverished that they could not hope to maintain them—

selves in the land without enforcing the services of the natives, and for this reason he had at length waived his own scruples in compliance with their repeated remonstrances."

The valley population, which had suffered the greatest displacement during the siege, was soon herded in to raze what was left of the city, fill in the canals and rebuild. Embassies from outlying tribes, coming in to tender allegiance to the victors, met expeditions going out in all directions with swords and branding irons, to take their pick of people and land. Only the Tlaxcalans and the other allies were to be exempted from servitude.

"Curious readers will ask me," says Bernal Díaz, "why the real conquerors who won New Spain and the great and strong city of Mexico, why we did not settle down there instead of going off to other provinces. They do well to ask and I will explain. We looked in the tribute books of Moctezuma to learn from what parts gold had been brought, and where there were mines and cacao and mantles; and we wanted to go to those parts which we saw had paid tribute in gold to the great Moctezuma, especially since as great a captain and friend of Cortés as Sandoval was setting us an example; and also because we saw that in none of the towns around Mexico were there gold mines or cotton or cacao, only many cornfields and magueyales, from which they get wine, and for this reason we held it to be a poor region, and we went to other provinces to settle, and in all of them we were disappointed. I remember I went to Cortés to get permission to accompany Sandoval, and he said to me: 'Honestly, brother Bernal Díaz del Castillo, you are laboring under a delusion, and I should like to have you stay here with me, but if it is your wish to go with your friend, Gonzalo de Sandoval, go ahead, and I will always look out for your interests; but I know very well that you will be sorry you left me.'"

Hairy, bowlegged Sandoval, twenty-five years old and probably Cortés' ablest captain, rode down among the alligators and blue butterflies of *la tierra caliente* south of Vera

Cruz, which, with regions included in the present southwestern states of Guerrero and Oaxaca, had sent Moctezuma most of his gold. Sandoval "was not avaricious of gold," if we are to believe his friend, "but attentive to his business like a good officer," so his first act was to take the Zapotec town of Tuxtepec, where some Spaniards had been killed, and burn the chief at the stake. Bernal Díaz uses the term mine to mean placer mining, for the gold that went to Tenochtitlán had merely been washed from river sand by the use of gourds. In his search for the yellow metal Sandoval rode up and down those sluggish meandering rivers, tearing a way through orchids, trampling shell-pink fuchsias. If he reserved for himself what promised to be the richest spots he saw that his men were amply provided for. Bernal Díaz was well pleased with the *encomienda* which he received in the province of Coatzacoalcos, in spite of the fact that he found himself plagued by mosquitoes again. For the time being he and Sandoval had little opportunity to exploit their estates, for Cortés ordered them to the Pánuco, where mosquitoes bred with difficulty due to a black sticky film which covered the lagoons and mud flats.

The Huastecs had made such stubborn resistance that Cortés himself finally had had to lead an army against them. His departure had been the signal for another uprising, which Sandoval crushed stolidly, hanging or burning four hundred chieftains at one time. The fagots blazed fiercely, giving off a dense black smoke and an odor that made the Spaniards draw back, holding their noses. The wood was impregnated with *chapopotli*, which the Aztecs had mixed with herbs and used as incense in their temples.

Judging by the dogged way in which they defended their independence, perhaps because of that doggedness, the Huastecs have been unduly maligned by both Aztecs and Spaniards. The former are said to have regarded Huastecs as such poor fighters that Huitzilopochtli's priests did not welcome them as sacrifices. (Ancient history? Frederick Starr, the ethnologist,

writes of the Huastecs in our century: "*Mestizos* and Aztecs both speak of them with contempt and treat them like dogs. As for their language, it is neglected and despised; while many of them know both Spanish and Aztec, neither *mestizo* nor Aztec considers it worth while to know a word of Huastec.") Yet Huastecs and allies in Hidalgo defeated an army of the Aztec ruler, Tizoc, who as a result had only forty prisoners to offer at his inauguration. Aztec rule over the Pánuco region consisted in little more than the collection of tribute, including *chapopotli*, from the Huastec capital of Chila, on the shores of Lake Chairel, where the modern city of Tampico stands.

"There was this about the Huastecs," reports Bernal Díaz, "after we thought we had them defeated they rallied and stood up three times against our charges, as Indians seldom did . . . But I want to say that in all New Spain there were no people more unclean and wicked and with more disgusting customs than these of the Pánuco province. They were drunkards; they were dirty and sinful; they were given to thirty other perversities. If we reflect they were chastised in fire and blood two or three times, and worse evils were visited upon them in the governorship of Nuño de Guzmán, who as soon as he took office made almost all of them slaves and shipped them to the Indies for sale."

The Spaniards were determined to establish themselves at the mouth of the Pánuco because of its harbor. They saw less economic value in *chapopotli* than had the Aztecs, who used it as a paint mixture and as a body ointment in certain religious ceremonies. Sahagún mentions it as being on sale in the market at Tenochtitlán, together with cloth, sandals and rope, made from the henequen plant of Yucatán, the "green gold" of a later century. Sahagún informs us that "*chapopotli* is a pitch that comes out of the sea. It is like the tar of Castile, and melts easily. The sea casts it up with the waves on certain days when the moon is in her state of increase; it comes like a

wide thick blanket, and those who live by the sea go to collect it on the shore. This *chapopotli* is odoriferous and prized by women, and when it is thrown in the fire its odor spreads far."

*Chapopote*, Mexicans call the stuff now. We know it as crude oil.

To the Spaniards gold had but one color, and from all accounts Oaxaca yielded more than any other part of pre-Conquest Mexico, although the Zapotecs kept most of it to work themselves. So southward into Tehuantepec dashed Pedro de Alvarado. It seemed for a time that he was going to be able to glut himself. The chief who had received him with fatal presents of gold and who had had more gold stirrups made at his demand was seized and subjected to tortures designed to extort from him all the gold in the isthmus. "Although Fray Bartolomé de Olmedo comforted and consoled him this did not prevent the Indian from dying," says Bernal Díaz. "The chieftainship passed to his son, and from him Alvarado got much more gold than from the father." As soon as the captain's back was turned the Zapotecs rose "because of the cruelties which Alvarado had inflicted without any cause or justice." The sight of him returning, however, was enough to make them drop their arms and flee to the mountains.

If Alvarado wanted Oaxaca for himself he should have brought back less gold to Mexico City and should have made Cortés believe that the hectic brightness in his eyes came from fever in the hot country, "land of bats and mosquitoes and even *chinchés*." When Cortés was superseded in the governorship of New Spain by the first viceroy, Antonio de Mendoza, the conqueror had as recompense the title of Marquis of the Valley and a grant of over twenty-five thousand square miles, embracing the valleys of Oaxaca, Toluca and Cuernavaca, the Pacific half of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec and a third of what is now the state of Vera Cruz, and including more than one hundred thousand Indians.



Xochimilco, with its thirty thousand inhabitants, fell to Alvarado, who became known as an exemplar of Christian knights because of the speed with which his Indians were swept into the new religion. The fact that in one day two priests baptized over half the entire population of Xochimilco is best explained by Father Alegre, historian of the Jesuits in Mexico: "Fear of punishment rather than desire that their children shall be Christians makes the Indians bring them to baptism." The *chinampas* of Xochimilco crossed the water no more. The roots of flowers and trees found their way through the interstices of the rafts and down to the lake bed, mooring the "floating gardens" for all time.

Another captain received the ten thousand square miles that comprise the present state of Guanajuato. The *encomienda* of Xilotepec carried with it one hundred and thirty thousand Indians. Half a century after the fall of Tenochtitlán most of the plateau and parts of the rest of Mexico that seemed exploitable were held by some five hundred Spaniards. The same period saw the beginnings of landholding on a small scale. Sometimes foot soldiers were awarded *peonías*, mostly pasture land, of two hundred acres or less, while horsemen received *caballerías* of five times that extent. Often later immigrants obtained small farm tracts. Many of these properties survived as *ranchos*, but the development of a rural middle class was hindered at the outset by the pretensions of the *encomenderos* and all but checked by the growth of the equivalent of the *encomienda*, the hacienda, in the latter part of the nineteenth century. In latifundia Spain had laid its heaviest burden on Mexico.

A parallel of sorts may be found in the Aztec system, it is true. The rulers from Moctezuma the Elder on sometimes granted sections of conquered territory to distinguished warriors, for the purposes of pacification and colonization. Ownership of these lands did not leave the ruler in Tenochtitlán, however.

In the same way the *encomiendas* were not owned by

individual Spaniards in the sense that Englishmen who settled in the New World owned their land. We speak loosely of Mexico's colonial period. Mexico, New Spain, was not a colony of Spain but a patrimony of the Spanish kings, who held individual private title to all the lands of Spanish America, title which entirely excluded right of private ownership on the part of the inhabitants. The *encomiendas* were originally concessions which were to revert to the Crown after two generations. By the Law of Reversion titles granted to *encomenderos* were revocable at the will of the king—which meant at the will of any viceroy who had royalty's ear. While actually they were the object of bidding and wire pulling each time a new viceroy was appointed, theoretically the *encomendero* could count on continued enjoyment of his title as long as—and only as long as—he made proper use of it. Governor Cortés, for instance, foreseeing the results of the racial admixture for which he had set an example, threatened to expropriate the *encomiendas* of all married Spaniards who did not bring their wives from Spain and of all bachelors who failed to provide themselves with Spanish wives within eighteen months.

Among those affected by this last ruling was Pedro de Alvarado, too circumspect a gallant to be called a Don Juan. Cortés had made a misstep in Cuba and found himself compelled to carry out his promise of marriage to a lady whose family had influence with the governor. She followed him to Mexico but died opportunely, leaving him free to contract a better match. Her death is attributed to asthma by Bernal Díaz, by others to her husband's muscular hands on her windpipe. Alvarado was remaining a bachelor until he became a prize, sought after by the noblest families of Spain. Nor was he disturbed by the possibility of losing his flowery *encomienda*, for his eyes, hot with unabated gold fever, were fixed now on the south. Beyond Tehuantepec lay a land where gold was said to be so plentiful that fishermen used it for sinkers. . . .

This insecurity of title worked to the detriment of the Indians, for the sole thought of the *encomendero* was to get wealth out of the ground as quickly as possible. "The Spaniards, after using their Indians, care better for their dogs," writes a monk. "It is a common thing to hear: I have Indians for three years, and I for four, and I for two, and I for only one, and when these are finished, if they do not give me more, I shall go back to Castile."

Yet it was not this heartless and shortsighted exhaustion of man power which makes one reflect with such unscholarly satisfaction that most of the *encomenderos* ended their lives as did Cortés, embittered, saddled with debts, entangled in lawsuits. If their further conduct could be attributed to fear of Indian uprisings, the apologist might put it in the same category as the Cholula massacre. But Mexico knew horrors in those days which must be ascribed to sadism or to M. Brion's "habit in evil," which "had its climax in letting the Spaniards consider the most repulsive and horrible tortures as entirely natural." In Yucatán Governor Montejo's dogs grew fat on a diet of Maya babies. . . .

Soon entire countrysides were depopulated. Nuño de Guzmán boasted of having burned eight hundred villages in Jalisco. To feed the maw of the mines which had been opened up, *encomenderos* had to raid higher and higher into the mountains, where refugees from whip and branding iron were living like wild beasts. The clergy began to protest, some because they saw their revenues dwindling, others—and I wish it were not necessary to say that these constituted a minority—out of compassion. The Dominicans in particular espoused the cause of the Indians, and it was one of this brotherhood who by a sermon in Santo Domingo moved a Spanish soldier of French extraction to take priest's orders and become "the self-appointed advocate for a whole race." No statue in Mexico has a finer inscription than his in the Plaza del Seminario, east of the cathedral: "Stranger, if you

love virtue, stop and venerate. This is Fray Bartolomé de las Casas, Father of the Indians."

The pleas, arguments and heated arraignments of Fray Bartolomé were largely responsible for the passing of the "Laws of the Indies," designed to protect the natives. The Dominican was not deceived by the wholesale baptisms which followed the Conquest. (In fifteen years, a church historian estimated, more than nine million souls were baptized.) Observing that the Indians prayed to the earth every time they handled it, he contended that unless they were given back their fields they could not be saved.

If in the emphasis on use and inalienability there was an analogy between old and new concepts of land tenure in Mexico, there was a further one in the fact that each Castilian village had its own ground: a town site or *fundo legal*, a common or *ejido* and other land for the villagers' joint use in agriculture, grazing and woodcutting. The Crown sought to preserve these familiar features in the Aztec system, confirming each pueblo in its possession of a *fundo legal*, surrounded by an *ejido* a league square. It was further ordered that additional land was to be given a village if the size of its population warranted, "to whatever extent appears necessary so that the Indians may live and cultivate without shortage or limitation."

"The touchstone of modern agrarian reform," Ernest Gruening calls "these royal legalizations of previously existing practice and of contemporary needs."

Fray Bartolomé knew his countrymen, however, and wrote that "all the king's decrees, orders and desires will never hold back, as they had not to date, the incurable and insatiable greed and ambition of the Spaniards."

He refused the rich bishopric of Cuzco, with which the Crown wished to reward his services, but in 1544, at the age of seventy, accepted the miserable one of Chiapas, where dead Pedro de Alvarado still ruled by the terror of his name.

Alvarado had headed an expedition into Guatemala in De-

ember 1523. Events of his two years of campaigning there are recorded in the Cakchiquel Annals:

“If you do not bring me the precious metal in all your towns I shall burn you alive and hang you.’ Thus did he speak to our chiefs. Then he cut from them the gold ornaments that they wore in their ears; and the chiefs wept before him . . . ‘Woe to you if you do not give it.’ . . . So said he to the chiefs.”

Alvarado wrote to Cortés after a battle with the Quichés:

“This is a land of such deep gullies—a thousand feet deep or more—that I cannot punish these people as they deserve . . . So I determined to burn their chiefs who admitted to me that they were the ones who had given the order that we were to be destroyed in their city. This they confessed and said, moreover, that they desired to be burned. And as I had discovered them to have so evil a disposition against His Majesty, and to secure the peace of this land, I burned them . . .

“At present I have nothing more to relate, save that all the prisoners of war were branded and made slaves, of which I gave His Majesty’s fifth part to the treasurer and he sold them at public auction so that the payment to His Majesty should be secure . . .

“We are in the wildest country and among the fiercest people ever seen. And, so that my lord may grant me victory, I beg Your Grace to command that a procession of all the priests and friars be held in your city of Mexico, so that Our Lady may be pleased to aid us. We are here so far from all help that if she does not come to our assistance, then there is no hope for us.

“Also I beg you to be sure to inform His Majesty how we have served him, both with our persons and with our property, so that he may grant us privileges . . .”

Made governor and *adelantado*, "exploiter," of the territory which he had conquered, Alvarado at last summoned a Spanish bride to the City of Santiago of the Knights of Guatemala, which he had founded on the slope of the Volcano of Water. The beautiful Francisca de la Cueva sailed on the first ship but died of fever upon landing in Vera Cruz. Alvarado brought her sister over, the equally beautiful and more haughty Beatriz. One niece of the powerful Duke of Albuquerque would serve Don Pedro as well as another. He built her a palace on a height overlooking the city, where there was room for his flock of happy children that included the daughter of the Tlaxcalan Doña Luisa. Then, with the financial backing of his father-in-law, Alvarado turned his thoughts to the land beyond Darien where the very cooking pots were said to be of solid gold.

Most of the other surviving *conquistadores* were spent, old before their time. Many were entering holy orders, to bask in the sunlight of monastery gardens; Alvarado was still the headlong youth of 1519, the whirlwind that had ravaged Cozumel. The pull of gold would never let him rest. Down in Peru Pizarro had seized greater treasures than those of Mexico, but as yet golden Ecuador was untouched. In 1534 Alvarado hurriedly fitted out an armada, landed on the Ecuadorian coast and led five hundred Spaniards up into the snow toward Quito. A fourth of them fell, food for condors. When the remainder emerged on the plateau, nine thousand feet above the Pacific, they came upon the prints of horseshoes. Spaniards were ahead of them. Alvarado would have fought for the right to sack the land, but Pizarro prevailed upon him to accept one hundred thousand gold pesos and return to Guatemala.

The Spice Islands then! In 1541 Alvarado sailed with a larger fleet, putting in at a port of Jalisco for water and supplies to last across the Pacific. A letter came to him there from Cristóbal de Oñate, acting governor of the province, asking

his assistance in putting down a revolt. The Indians who had been subjugated by Nuño de Guzmán had fortified the *peñoles*, rocky hills, north of Guadalajara and it was impossible to dislodge them. Alvarado rode inland with a small force, mightily pleased by the appeal. Mexico should have one more chastisement to remember him by. Three charges of his cavalry against the *peñol* of Nochistlan were repulsed and thirty of his men were killed. To his fury, the rest broke and fled, pursued by Indians. Even Alvarado had to run—and on foot. While he was scrambling up the side of a ravine the horse of a soldier above him lost its footing and fell, crushing Don Pedro. He was carried in to Guadalajara, where he lingered for eleven days in agony. Bernal Díaz says that his death was unnecessary. Had he not been moved such a distance Alvarado would have lived to sack the Spice Islands and Cathay.

Perhaps the passing of such a man called for a hecatomb.

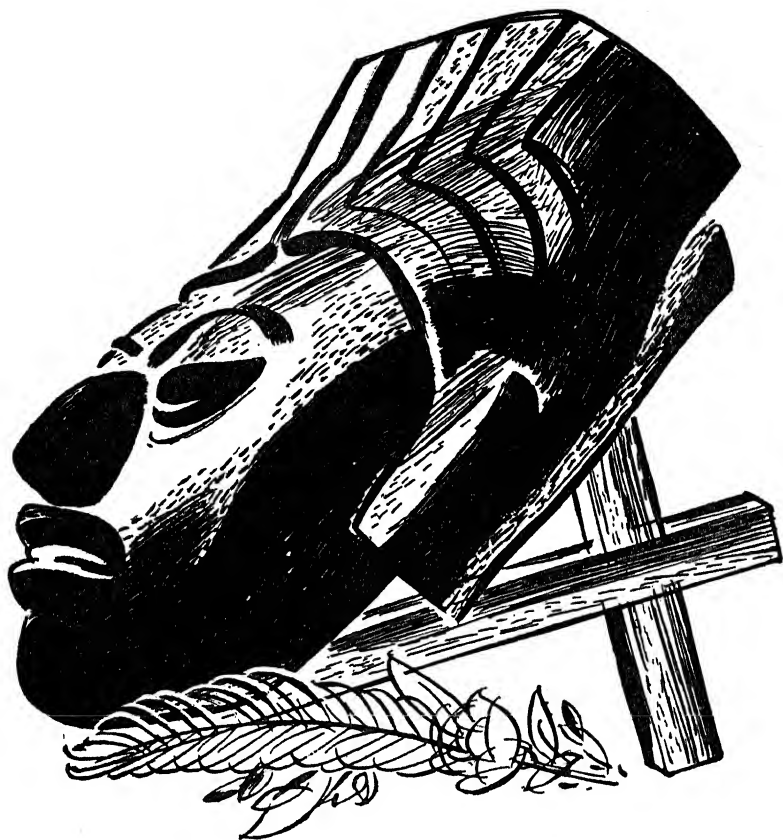
When news of his death reached Guatemala Doña Beatriz “scratched her face and tore her hair.” The name of the place where her lord had received his fatal injury meant “All Black.” She ordered that the entire palace, inside and out, should forever after be black. The patio walls, the chapel, the kitchen, the stables, “even the privies” were covered with thick black paint. The widow shut herself up in a blackened room without a candle. To the priest who came to console her she said “that it was in God’s power to inflict no greater misfortune upon her.” This was blasphemy, and the man of God crossed himself at the sound of thunder and drumming rain. Day after day the rain continued to come down in torrents. A lake collected in the crater of the Volcán de Agua and rose steadily toward its rim, while the frightened city kept its eyes lifted to the black palace on the volcano’s slope. Black: color to Indians “divine, sacred, and holy from time immemorial.”

Up in Jalisco an Indian attack on Guadalajara had been repulsed when St James led a squadron of angels out of a burning church, riding down and blinding the heathen. With the example of their patron saint to follow and with Alvarado’s

death to avenge, the Spaniards had gouged out the eyes of every Indian who fell into their hands.

Earthquakes rocked Alvarado's city, splitting the crater directly above the palace and loosing the flood. His Tlaxcalan daughter escaped when the black walls collapsed, but Doña Beatriz and one of his natural children were crushed to death. In the city six hundred Spaniards and uncounted Indians were drowned or crushed.





## CHAPTER IX

# Dark Men, Dark Gods

“NEAR the mountains,” writes Father Sahagún, “are three or four places where they used to offer most solemn sacrifices and to which they came from distant lands. One of these is here in Mexico, where there is a little hill called Tepeyac, now called

Our Lady of Guadalupe. At this place the Indians had a temple dedicated to the mother of the gods, whom they called Tonantzin, which means 'Our Mother.' There they formerly made many sacrifices in honor of this goddess. From all parts of Mexico men and women, boys and girls used to come to these fiestas, bringing many offerings. Great were the gatherings in those days, and everyone would say: 'Let us go to the fiesta of Tonantzin.' "

A Spanish wrecking party soon came to the temple of Tepeyac, where the northern causeway parted from the mainland. Tonantzin herself was not destroyed, the Indian knew. For who can destroy that which is in the earth and sends forth the maize? True, a man's *milpa* withholds its yield in the dry season, therefore care had always been taken to hold special fiestas in honor of Tonantzin and the Tlalocs in Atemoztli, the month of the winter solstice. Also, a *milpa* may become sterile as punishment to its cultivator. But after a period of fallow-ness, if he has propitiated Tonantzin, its fertility will come back. So Our Mother was left homeless for a time and had to wander over those hills northeast of Mexico City, hills which the Spaniards had stripped of trees to make woodwork for their palaces in the capital, hills which grew more barren than ever during the course of this particular dry season and which were scarred by the deep gullies that the last of the rains had washed out. . . .

The priests, meanwhile, set the baptized Indians to work, building churches and fashioning holy images. A policy of terrorism was adopted to stamp out idolatrous practices. A bishop of Chiapas instituted an ecclesiastical prison, with fetters and stocks, where priests of the old religion suspected of continuing their functions were treated with especial severity. Sahagún tells of Franciscan methods.

"We were greatly helped at first by the boys, both those whom we reared in the monasteries (sons of the chiefs) and those whom we taught in the patios (sons of the people).

After they had been taught some time, one or two friars would accompany them, and they would go to a temple and destroy it in a few days, and thus there was left not even a sign of it, nor of any buildings dedicated to idols. These boys also helped to extirpate the idolatrous rites that were carried on at night in the houses, and the drunkenness and ceremonies and other things done at night in honor of the idols, because in the daytime they would spy to see where it would be done that night, and in that hour sixty or seventy of them would go with one or two Religious, and they would arrest the idolaters and take them to the monastery and punish them. There they made them do penitence, and taught them Christianity, and made them go to matins in the morning, and beat themselves, and this for some weeks, until they repented of what they had done, and departed, catechized and punished, and if they repeated the offense, and were caught, they were again punished."

When an outward conformity had been enforced, it was observed how little sense of strangeness Indians had in Christian churches. Not only were these in many cases built out of the stones of *teocallis*, but resemblances between the old creed and the new were many and curious. One priest accounts for them thus: "The conversion of the natives was facilitated because the devil introduced things which he stole from our evangelic law, such as their method of communion, baptism, confession and adoration, which, despite the enemy, served that they received in truth what they had formerly received in falsehood."

As time went on fewer and fewer priests echoed such assurance. In 1576, ten years after Las Casas had died in a Spanish monastery, still waging with the pen his losing battles, Sahagún was writing:

"Now the Church of Our Lady of Guadalupe is built on the hill of Tepeyac, but the Indians call her Tonantzin too, in the same manner as the prelates call Our Lady the Mother of

God, which is Tonantzin in Aztec . . . And now they come to visit this Tonantzin from afar, from just as far as before; which devotion also is suspicious, because everywhere there are many churches of Our Lady, and they do not go to them, but come from great distances to this Tonantzin, as formerly."

I think the Franciscan knew perfectly well that Tonantzin had come back, had "moved in" on the reluctant priests.

It is uncertain how much "staging" there was to her return. Apparently Archbishop Zumárraga was not quite prepared for it when on Saturday morning, December 9, 1531 (just before the winter solstice, that is, in the month formerly called Atemoztli), a shaky, bleary-eyed Indian, a convert renamed Juan Diego, was brought before him, babbling of a beautiful woman who had appeared to him out of a cloud while he was passing Tepeyac. The archbishop sniffed, both literally and figuratively. Before the Conquest the strictest of prohibition laws had been in force among the Aztecs, only the old being allowed free use of liquor. Drunkenness in a youth had been punishable by public humiliation or in the case of repeated offenders by death, although a man over thirty might indulge during certain religious ceremonies, while engaged in hard manual labor or in warfare. Now these regulations were gone, and at every opportunity the Indian went to the maguey for release. Juan Diego's uncle was a *tlachiquero*, one who draws the sap from the maguey, and made particularly good pulque. The uncle was ill. . . .

Archbishop Zumárraga sent the man on his way. Then, probably, he sat thinking. At last he must have shrugged—in capitulation. The rest of the story is his:

It was the Virgin Mary who appeared to the Indian, with the request that he inform the archbishop that she wished a church to be built on the side of Tepeyac. When Juan Diego reported to her what little credence he had found she instructed him to try again the next day. Zumárraga, still skeptical, suggested that he bring some token of the divine will. Back to Tepeyac trotted Juan, to receive the Virgin's injunc-

tion to return on the following day for his sign. But on Monday his uncle was worse and he neglected his mission. On the twelfth the old man was dying and Juan set out to fetch a priest. Thinking that this was no time for apparitions, he took another path around the hill. The Virgin intercepted him, however, at a well where he stopped to drink. She bade him climb to the top of the hill, pick some roses and, when they had been blessed by her, take them to the archbishop in his *tilma*, or blanket. He need not worry about his uncle, who had recovered. Although nothing except cactus and other desert vegetation had ever been seen on Tepeyac during the dry season Juan found a garden of roses there. A greater surprise was in store for him. When he spread out his *tilma* and laid the flowers at the feet of the archbishop a picture of the Virgin was painted on the cloth!

Needless to say, Zumárraga was convinced and lost no time in sending out news of the miracle. It was accepted without question by the Indians and caused a "wave of apostolic piety" to sweep the land. Juan's *tilma* was placed in the cathedral in Mexico City while the Virgin's wishes were being complied with. Juan and his family received pensions for life.

Then—more to the chagrin of the archbishop, doubtless, than to the confusion of the Indians—miracles began to be reported from all over Mexico. A Tlaxcalan fugitive from a smallpox epidemic was dying of thirst on a hillside when the Virgin appeared and saved him by causing a spring to burst forth at her feet. A church was to be erected there, she said, and the water would thereafter be curative. Today no Mexican virgin is more efficacious in warding off pestilence than the Virgin of Ocotlán, whose fiesta falls in May and corresponds to the old spring fiesta of the Tlaxcalans.

The town of Amecameca, at the foot of the volcanoes, claimed that the Virgin had made her first appearance there and had wanted a church built on the site of the temple of Teteoinan, a goddess of ripe maize. Displeased at her reception, she had left the Amecamecans and gone to Tepeyac. In

answer to their prayers, however, she consented to return to them every September, when, as it happened, Teteoinan's fiesta had been held. Her chapel now stands on the crest of the Sacred Mount. Below it, reached by a stone stairway marked by the Stations of the Cross, is a shrine built around the cave in which lived Fray Martín de Valencia, leader of the twelve "Apostles" who introduced the order of St Francis to Mexico, landing at San Juan de Ulúa in 1524 and making the journey to the capital on foot within a month. Inside is the grave of the "Father of the Mexican Church," also El Santo Entierro, a life-size image of Christ made from the pith of cornstalks. A mule is credited with being the agent of this miracle. One of a train that was carrying images to Mexico City, he broke away and ran up the Sacro Monte to this cave—where Tlaloc had lived before Fray Martín. Thus was demonstrated the divine will that the Christ which the mule bore should remain there.

Other mules immortalized themselves. In 1543 a strange one appeared in a train that was transporting merchandise from Vera Cruz to Guatemala. Near the city of Oaxaca he lay down. A box was taken from his back, opened and found to contain a lovely image of Our Lady of Solitude at the foot of the cross. So a church went up there and Nuestra Señora de la Soledad became to southern Mexico what the Virgin of Guadalupe had become to the center.

Everywhere it was the fertility goddesses who returned first.

The Virgin of Guadalupe prevailed over her competitors and by a decree of Pope Benedict XIV became the patroness of Mexico. "Non fecit taliter omni natione," he exclaimed upon being shown a copy of the miraculous painting: "She has done this for no other nation." Over the altar of her mighty basilica is still displayed the *tilma* of Juan Diego. The picture is there, under thick glass, for all to see. Studying it, the foreigner accustomed to Virgins after European models is likely to be as disconcerted as was Maximilian's Carlota. For

La Guadalupana is dark, dark as an Indian. She has straight Indian hair, parted precisely in the middle, Indian-fashion. Her features are those of an Indian girl. She stands where the Christian Mary scarcely belongs, in the cup of the moon.

Over Juan's drinking place is the Chapel of the Little Well, with its three tiled domes of blue and white and chrome yellow. Stone steps lead up to the Chapel of the Little Hill, where Juan gathered his roses. This is the religious capital of Mexico and, as the twelfth of December approaches, people all over the country are saying: "*¡Vámonos a la fiesta de la Virgen!*"

I find no opinion expressed by Sahagún as to Juan Diego's vision, but I can see him shaking his head as he writes:

"This seems a device of the devil, to conceal idolatry by the error in the use of this name Tonantzin . . . And I am convinced that there are many other places in these Indies where reverence and offerings are paid covertly to idols, and advantage taken of the Church's holy festivals. It would be well to investigate this matter, in order that these poor people may have their eyes opened to the error into which they have fallen."

Poor Franciscan! He was getting along in years when he penned those lines. He had labored with the Indians in a more enlightened way than most of his fellows. Don't try to prevent them from bringing their offerings to these ancient places of worship, he had advised. "But on those holy days make them understand that what they are doing proceeds from their former falsehoods and that these days are not like the old ones. This should be the work of preachers well versed in their language and old-time customs, as well as in the Holy Scriptures."

Yet, as he brings his history to a close, frustration as unmistakable as the odor of old books emanates from its pages. The Tlaxcalan church of Saint Anna, which replaced a temple to the maize goddess, Toci, Our Grandmother, is drawing great numbers of Indians, "although Saint Anna never per-

formed any miracles there." And they are calling Saint Anna Toci. Of course they are taught that, since Saint Anna is the grandmother of Jesus, she is also our grandmother, the grandmother of all Christians; but these pilgrimages are made on the very days that were the old days of sacrifice, and one wonders whom they are really worshiping. "At Xochimilco there is a very clear and beautiful spring, under whose water was a stone idol to which they offered copal. I saw the idol and went under the water to drag it out, and I put there a stone cross, which is still there. But elsewhere at Xochimilco they throw offerings upon the water even today." A brother has told him of finding fresh offerings of paper, copal and tiny *petates* in some springs on a mountain near Toluca, where sacrifices used to be held. And right in Lake Texcoco there is a whirlpool, where they used to make sacrifices every year, putting a three- or four-year-old baby into a little canoe and letting the water swallow it. This whirlpool is said to have an outlet in a deep pool at Apazco Santiago. "When the lake waters rise the pool rises; when the waters sink it sinks. And there, I am told, are often found little canoes."

By the end of the first century of New Spain's existence the clergy as a whole had given up missionizing and was reaching out for real estate as avidly as the *encomenderos* for gold. It proved almost as hard a taskmaster. "Things have changed decidedly," Viceroy Villa-Manrique wrote to Philip II in 1587. "The brothers of St Augustine and St Dominic, in and around the villages in their charge for teaching the gospel, have founded many profitable haciendas through the sweat, labor and savings of the natives whom they are indoctrinating, and who are so overworked in the cultivation of these properties that they are nearing extinction day by day."

At the close of the sixteenth century there were four hundred convents in New Spain, and a churchman himself admitted: "It would be impossible for me or any other to count the churches."



Here is the testimony of Dr Manuel Gamio, dean of Mexican anthropologists, as to what happened:

"The old indigenous gods of war, of the harvests, of the rains, etc., were given the names of white gods and as 'saints'—Santiago, San Francisco, San Isidro, and many others—ruled in the new *teocallis* instead of Huitzilopochtli, Tlaloc, Teozintle, etc. . . . The consequence of this pretended religious conversion was that the Indian saw his traditional picturesque religion degenerate and disappear; now he paid tenths, first, and other taxes; he lost part of his rural property to the convents. His labor was used, almost for nothing, for the construction of churches and monasteries, and such was the greed and cruelty of the friars, that incessant protests were carried to the Spanish crown; among others, one famous in history, that of Archbishop Montúfar himself. The situation has been prolonged for four centuries, doing incalculable injury to ten or twelve million indigenes and *mestizos*. About three million Mexicans, generally of the white race and inhabitants of the cities, can rightly be denominated Catholics, for they are relatively identified with the Roman Church and uncontaminated with the polytheistic crudities of the other group."

In his book, *Forjando Patria*, Dr Gamio describes a ceremony which he witnessed in the Sierra de Zongolica, state of Vera Cruz, among Indians—Popolocas, Mixtecs and Zapotecs—whom the Church numbers as Catholics in its statistics:

"When their cornfields begin to sprout and give forth young shoots they consider it indispensable for some old Indian, possessor of mysterious incantations, to protect the crop from destructive animals, especially the deer, which in the silent moonlit nights come down from the mountain . . . The lowly native, true priest of his race, hums in the Aztec tongue and in fearful and supplicant tone entreats the deer god not to graze his children, the deer of the forest, in the sacred corn-

field. A little later under a great silk-cotton tree which intercepts the light of the moon, a fire is burning; on the live coals are sacrificed birds, scrapings from the horns and hoofs of deer, strips from the plantain tree, and amber-colored grains of copal which the dark brown hand of the sorcerer throws on the fire, enveloping himself in fleeting white smoke clouds. This at bottom is naught else but the old prayer to the God of the chase, the 'heart of the mountain,' as the Aztecs called him."

In those Gulf regions a god named Ixtlilton, "The Black One," was worshiped before the Conquest. Now some of the most famous images of Christ in southern Vera Cruz and Tabasco are black. Thousands of pilgrims go yearly to Esquipulas, near the Guatemalan border, to kneel before the jet-black wooden *imagen* of Our Lord of Esquipulas.

Christ and all his saints had to follow the example of the Virgin of Guadalupe and change their complexions if they were to live in Mexico. Such a transformation became a miracle at Tlacotepec, near Puebla. There, legend has it, the devil tempted the Indians to return to their old religion, pointing out how unlike them was this white Christ. One Sunday at the benediction "the faithful clearly saw the Holy Christ of Tlacotepec had darkened in color although at the beginning of the mass He had been white."

Ignacio Manuel Altamirano, the pure-blooded Aztec who was one of Mexico's foremost and highly versatile men of letters of the nineteenth century, wrote that the image of Santiago of Tlaltelolco in the Federal District, "the true Indian God, is of markedly indigenous type, dark, slight beard, prominent cheekbones, nose aquiline and broad, black eyes slightly oblique, straight and disordered hair, a sarcastic and arrogant mouth, coarse cotton-cloth shirt fastened with a string at the throat . . . white wide trousers pulled high, native sandals, broad-brimmed palm sombrero turned up in front with a leather band. . . . He is mounted on a spirited horse, of the

breed of our southland, and carries a horn-handled machete, likewise characteristic of that region. In short, he is the type of guerrilla warrior of my mountains."

The early friars were encouraged by the Indians' readiness to give devotion to this equestrian Santiago. St James is still popular in rural Mexico. One often sees his mount adorned with little ex-votos: images of sick horses, burros, cattle. At the Mexican Eucharistic Congress of 1924 a priest reported that the Indians of his region observed the day of Santiago properly enough, but that they showed more enthusiasm in celebrating a day for San Jacobo. San Jacobo? Frowns cut into ecclesiastical foreheads. Yes, said the priest, St James's horse had become St Jacob, worker of veterinary miracles.

One detail, along with the profusion of flowers, strikes the most unobservant of visitors familiar with Catholic churches in Europe and the United States: the realistic bloodiness of every Christ, every martyr. "The crucifixes in the Indian churches are repulsive," states the Catholic Encyclopedia, "and only in rare instances have the priests succeeded in improving or changing these images." The cult of the broken body and the shed blood, interrupted at the literal stage of its development, had to find some expression.

It is quite likely that the reason why the European superstition of the evil eye, particularly as directed against children, took such a hold in Mexico was that children had been offered, weeping, to the Tlalocs. Dr Elsie Clews Parsons suggests that this superstition, in modernized form, was at work on the women of Mitla whom she saw snatch up their children and run when a party of American engineers came surveying the route of the Pan American Highway down to the Isthmus of Tehuantepec. Oaxaca was having its first kidnap scare. Word had spread that these blond strangers—doubtless the object of suspicion in any event because of their blondness—were *robachicos* and that the canvas cover of their truck concealed the bodies of infants from which they were extracting oil for their automobiles.

## CHAPTER X

# The King's Silver

"IMPRACTICAL place to put a town," many a husband has been frowned at for observing as his party came in sight of a crotch in the Guerrero mountains where tiled roofs, looking like red-backed playing cards lodged among the treetops, do not need the identification yelled by small boys along the road: "Taxco! Taxco!"

"A *beautiful* place, dear."

Taxco, lady and sir, is only a glorified mining camp.

The present state of Guerrero furnished the Aztecs with most of their gold. Cortés found deposits of tin there. Ancient workings of copper have come to light. Quantities of jade (so called, but actually jadeite) reached Tenochtitlán from Guerrero and northern Oaxaca, although mountains—and perhaps Indians—have kept every trace of it concealed from the white man. Chilpancingo appeared in Moctezuma's tribute books as a source of gold, a pueblo by the name of Tlaxtli (Quetzalcoatl's ball game) as an important one of silver. When the Spaniards took over the mines near the latter place they established a base in a more convenient location, north of the Indian village. New Taxco, as it was called, one of the few Mexican towns not built on pre-Columbian foundations, sent Spain its first Mexican silver, and one may still see where Cortés had a tunnel cut into a mountainside, sufficiently large

for the king to ride horseback through veins of the white metal.

Taxco was on the old Camino Real, the Royal Highway which began at Acapulco on the Pacific and rose and fell through the blue and gold mountains to Mexico City, then continued north to the mines of San Luis Potosí and on to the outposts of Spanish dominion in Texas. Rice fields in the warm valleys below Cuernavaca are not the only reminders in Guerrero and Morelos of the centuries when Mexican silver traveled down those cobblestones to be exchanged for the products of the Orient.

The docking of the annual galleon from Manila was a gala event which attracted to Acapulco's crescent beach not only Mexico City's fat merchants with native cochineal and European wares imported through Vera Cruz, but the viceroy and his court as well. Wives of the silver kings bid for mantillas and civet perfume from the Philippines; cotton goods from India; Chinese silks, porcelains, spices, furniture. Things Chinese were particularly fashionable in New Spain, with results discernible in present-day Mexican handicrafts—in the lacquer work of Olinalá, for instance.

In 1614 Acapulco welcomed the first Japanese embassy to visit the Western world. A colony of Filipinos was planted there. Negro slaves were introduced and thrived along the sultry coast, as at Vera Cruz but not elsewhere in Mexico. (The two or three Negroes whom one notices on the streets of Mexico City are from the States and would like to get back.) More than once, in the days of Sir William Dampier, the port had to train its guns on the sea, and I hear that when the tourist season is not in progress dusky sirens still bask on the reefs, combing their hair and watching for the return of the blond buccaneers.

Sometime or other a Chinese princess, captured on the Yellow Sea by pirates and sold as a slave in Manila, is supposed to have been bought in Acapulco by a pious Puebla merchant, who took her home with him and saw that she was converted

and adopted by a wealthy couple. A suspiciously sweet story is told of how the *China Poblana*, "China girl of Puebla," endeared herself to the inhabitants of the City of the Angels by her charities. She discarded her silks and wore a red flannel skirt with a green yoke and border at the bottom. This skirt, with sequins, plus a white embroidered blouse and a shawl now constitute the festive costume of Mexican girls, corresponding to the leather and silver outfit of the ranchman, the *charro*.

In the sacristy of the cathedral at Taxco is a remnant of an immense carpet imported from India via Acapulco by José de la Borda.

Taxco as it appears today is the chef-d'œuvre of this Frenchman, christened Joseph de la Borde, who came to New Spain in 1716, at the age of sixteen, and, with little scientific knowledge of mining, made and lost and made again eight-figured fortunes in silver. The "phoenix of the miners" was one of the most spectacular figures of viceregal Mexico. He may have been called with justice one of the most pious as well. At least he formulated and made into a working arrangement the understanding which before had existed tacitly between capitalistic church and lay capitalists: "God gives to Borda, Borda gives to God." A part of his income went regularly into "God's pocket." After a fiasco he could always put his hand into that pocket and borrow back enough to make a fresh start.

In Zacatecas and Michoacán his divine partner gave him wealth which had been guarded from lesser men, but at Taxco Borda found his biggest bonanza, so Taxco fared best at his hands. If he laid walled cobbled roads for the burro trains which brought his bullion in, he also rebuilt the town, planted laurel trees in its plaza and spent more than a million and a half pesos on a pink Churrigueresque cathedral, dedicated to San Sebastián and Santa Prisca. *Gloria a Dios en las alturas* is the neatly phrased inscription below its dome of glazed tiles: "Glory to God on the heights." Most famous of his gifts to it was a gold custodial, a yard and a half high, studded with 5872 diamonds, 2653 emeralds, 544 rubies, 106 amethysts and



28 sapphires. This was later taken to the cathedral of Mexico City, from which it was stolen during the French invasion of 1861. If a portrait of Borda by the Zapotec Miguel Cabrera hangs in the sacristy at Taxco, so does a complementary one of the town's greatest son, the dramatist Juan Ruiz de Alarcón. There is a notation on Borda's portrait that it was placed there after his death, "since his great humility would not permit this during his lifetime."

Cuernavaca benefited when Borda passed both his property and his policy on to his son, Don Manuel. In the city whose Indian name, Cuauhnahuac, "Near the Woods," the Spaniards corrupted into their "Cow's Horn," the young doctor of philosophy built for himself, at a cost of over a million pesos, a *buen retiro* in the Italian style, filling its gardens with mangoes and other exotic trees and flowers. Adjoining this retreat, he constructed a church for the Virgin of Guadalupe.

At the death of Don Manuel the entire Borda estate passed into the hands of the clergy.

Other cities had their Bordas, to many of whom Mexico is indebted architecturally.

The Valenciana mine, high above Guanajuato, gave its discoverer silver to the value of more than eight hundred million pesos and a patent of nobility. When he erected a Churrigueresque church he mixed powdered silver and rare Spanish wines into its mortar.

In the Álamos mining district of the west coast state of Sonora, the operator of the Quintera mine was able to line his daughter's bridal chamber with silver bars and to pave the path from his palace to the church with the same "pale chaste material."

In 1793 Pedro Romero de Terreros, who had made his acquaintance with mining as a muleteer, bought for a song the rights to the Real del Monte mine outside Pachuca, then extracted some fifteen million pesos' worth of silver. Among other benefactions, he supported missions in Coahuila and Texas and founded the Monte de Piedad, the National Pawn-



shop, to loan money to the poor at a low rate of interest. He received the title of Count of Regla when he presented a battleship to the king of Spain. According to one story, he invited his sovereign to visit him, promising that the royal feet would never touch the soil of New Spain, since a path of silver would lie before him whenever he stepped from his carriage.

Pachucans show visitors the huge stone strongbox in which the royal tribute from the mines was kept until it could be shipped overseas. For these magnates were only concessionaires, like the first *encomenderos*, hence their efforts to keep in the good graces of the Crown. Self-interest, then, would seem to dictate to the latter a policy of encouragement to such enterprise. Instead, the Crown was quick to suppress any competition to Spanish home industries. In 1557 a Pachuca miner hit on the "patio process" for amalgamating ore with quicksilver, thus revolutionizing the mining of silver. A royal order promptly forbade the extraction of mercury in New Spain, forcing miners there to import it at exorbitant prices from mines in Spain or, when these could not meet the demand, from the king's Hapsburg relatives in Austria.

A change of dynasty did not change the Spanish crown's patrimonial rights in the New World. The expulsion of the Jesuits by the Bourbon Charles III in 1767 meant, as a matter of course, that title to the properties held by them reverted to the Crown. Thirty years later his son, in need of cash, disposed of much of that real estate. No one, not even the Pope, thought of disputing his legal right to do so.

The royal order is worth a glance or two today:

"Through the expulsion of the members of the Company of Jesus from my dominions in Spain and the Indies, returns to my crown the dominion of all its goods . . . Pursuant to this right, the king, my august father, could have immediately incorporated in the royal treasury, as a part of his royal patrimony, the houses, haciendas and other properties taken over.

But as a manifestation of his royal liberality and munificence, he applied and destined a great part of them to the foundation, under the immediate sovereign protection, of various pious establishments, considered of public usefulness . . . But since then extraordinary and urgent needs of the monarchy have rendered necessary laying hands on such extraordinary resources—for the usefulness of those other objects is in no wise comparable to the far greater need of having the goods which properly belong to the state serve for its defense and conservation . . .”

Napoleon Bonaparte was creating those “extraordinary and urgent needs,” and it is in accordance with the ironic turn which great events and small have so often taken in Mexico that she should owe her independence to the man who was engaged in quashing independence across the Atlantic. The Mexican *Guerra de la Independencia* is not, however, the simple, decisive, laudable affair which it seems at first sight.

By the close of the eighteenth century four strata of society had developed in Mexico. At the top—numbering but fifteen thousand, less than one third of one per cent of the population, but monopolizing practically all public offices—were the European-born Spaniards, derogatorily called *gachupines*, “wearers of spurs.” Next came the native-born whites, the *criollos*, a term not synonymous with the word “creole” as used in the United States. Descendants of Spaniards, in many cases inheritors of immense wealth, they nevertheless held a social position inferior to that of the meanest laborer whose birthplace was Spain. Realizing from childhood what a blind alley they were in, they became as a class indolent and viciously resentful. If they entered one of the three professions open to them—church, army, law—it was to emulate the *gachupines* and grab the softest berths possible. Upon the *criollos*, and upon the policy of the Spanish crown which stifled initiative in them, rests the blame for much of the turmoil of the nineteenth century.

Something like a fifth of Mexico's population was white. Of the remainder, Indians outnumbered *mestizos*.

The Spanish blood of these last was often of the most illustrious, so they necessarily enjoyed some privileges. They stood apart from the Indians because of their exemption from tribute, a fixed residence, a prescribed costume. The lower posts in church and army were within their reach. They were distrusted by both Spaniard and *criollo*, however, because their Indian blood made them a potential threat to white supremacy. They were hated by the Indians because in an attempt to deny their dark blood they became more heartless oppressors than the secure whites.

The *encomienda* system had been definitely abolished in 1720, but debt slavery had taken its place. "Indians are imprisoned and forced to labor for a debt of a peso, being refused settlement of their account, and treated with the utmost brutality," writes a viceroy in a confidential report. "If one dies or flees, his woman or children are seized as slaves; these, badly nourished spiritually and worse physically, suffer in a land of Christians what barbarians would not practice." The Indian had but one compensation for his position at the bottom of the social scale. Since he was held to have the mentality of a child, he was not subject to the Inquisition, whereas *mestizos* as well as whites paid the penalty for heresy at the *Quemadero*, the burning place, which occupied the west half of what is now Mexico City's Alameda.

The Inquisition became more watchful than ever after the American and French revolutions and, although it was not able to bar all the subversive new ideas from Mexico, the caste lines there seemed indestructible when in 1808 Napoleon crossed the Pyrenees and by the breath of his coming toppled Ferdinand VII off the Spanish throne.

*Juntas* were formed in various parts of Spain to organize resistance to the French in the king's name. The municipal administration of Mexico City, the *Ayuntamiento*, which was controlled by *criollos*, resolved to form a *junta* of its own,

which incidentally would enable the city fathers to strengthen their position at the expense of the *Audiencia*, the viceregal council, and of the *gachupines* in general. When the viceroy lent an ear to the plan, which had been conceived with no view to independence but only to class aggrandizement, the *gachupines*, under the leadership of a man who saw his monopoly of the capital's meat supply threatened, rose, seized the viceroy and deported him to Spain. The *Audiencia* named in his stead one who could be depended upon to keep the *criollos* in their place.

The *criollos* organized in secret. Those were years of black masks and passwords, of betrayal and quick vengeance, the source of ready-made plots for generations of Mexican novelists. And as the conspirators whispered in dark cellars the idea of complete independence from Spain took shape and grew.

One of the most active of these groups met in Querétaro, city of opal mines, under the name of the Society for the Study of Fine Arts. Prominent members were the mayor, *Corregidor* Miguel Domínguez; his wife, María Josefa Ortiz Domínguez, whose fame eclipses his, whose portrait has graced a postage stamp, whose name many a girls' school now bears; Ignacio Allende, captain of a provincial regiment; and the curate of Dolores, in the adjoining state of Guanajuato, Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla.

Father Hidalgo (Mention him with respect in Mexico, even among freethinkers!) was of the stamp of Las Casas. One of those rural priests who were laboring with little pay and less encouragement while bishops and monastic orders formed a powerful and wealthy aristocracy in the cities, he represented the "radical" element in both church and state. He read the Encyclopedists and other works damned by the Inquisition. He knew the truth of Fray Bartolomé's words about the salvation of the Indians.

"What do these people through here live on?" travelers wonder as they gaze from the windows of the train approaching the village now named Dolores Hidalgo. That is high hard

plateau country, its beauty—which cannot be found in a hurry—the steely beauty of maguey and organ cactus and whittled mountain peaks, its only softnesses the blueness of distance, cloud shadows dappling the gray-brown soil and occasional emerald announcements of water. The train stops. The station platform, almost deserted one moment, is a market place the next. Trays of enchiladas, tacos, tamales. Jars of pulque. Baskets of aguacates, strawberries, apples, figs, peaches, limes, pomegranates. Candies made from fruit, yams, cactus. Sarapes, straw hats, hand-drawn work. Pottery, toys, tiny wicker furniture. The train never pauses long enough for one to take stock of half the wares. At Dolores Hidalgo or the next stop but one, San Miguel Allende, a bashful but earnest little Otomí tried to sell me a live chicken. . . .

While Father Hidalgo did not look ahead to the days of trains and tourists, the economic emancipation of the Indian was his goal, and such a scene would have delighted him. In his parish he established a pottery, a tannery and textile works, introduced bee culture and the silk worm. He and the Indians set out vineyards. He and they and the dark Virgin were on the way to becoming a perfect whole. He worked the land with his own hands and he felt what it was that his charges put into their songs of Catholic worship, into their *alabados*:

*Jesus our Lord is lost in the night,  
Sought for and found not, anear and afar.  
His mother says, "Have you not seen  
Him passing 'neath a star?"*

*Beloved Saint John and the Magdalene  
The Holy Mother's footsteps guide.  
Let us hurry, let us hurry  
To Calvary and to His side.*

*"Y por más que caminemos,  
Ya lo habrán crucificado.  
However fast we hasten there,  
They will have Him crucified."*

Spanish soldiers descended on the parish of Dolores. They cut down the mulberry trees, uprooted the grapevines, wrecked the factories. Fines put the Indians in debt for life. Wine was a Spanish monopoly. Silk and manufactures, of which Spain had practically none, had to be imported in Spanish ships and duty paid into the royal exchequer.

In like circumstances Las Casas had counseled submission and prayer to the Indians. When on the morning of September 16, 1810, the *corregidora* of Querétaro sent word that their conspiracy had been betrayed to the authorities, Hidalgo tolled the church bell, Mexico's Liberty Bell, and took down a banner of the Virgin of Guadalupe. His Indian flock assembled to hear the resounding but hopeless *Grito de Dolores*:

"My children, this day comes to us a new dispensation. Are you ready to receive it? Will you be free? Will you make the effort to recover from the hated Spaniards the lands stolen from your forefathers three hundred years ago?"

The land! The Indians ran for weapons—machetes, slings, bows and arrows, stakes hardened in fire—and followed Hidalgo and the Virgin toward Guanajuato. Although they were joined at San Miguel El Grande, now San Miguel Allende, by Captains Allende and Juan Aldama with their troops, the force was still a rabble, not an army. And belief in the righteousness of his cause could not make Hidalgo a military leader. Guanajuato was taken by storm, but in the sack of the city, which he was powerless to prevent, the Indians did not always stop to distinguish between white men born in Spain and those born in Mexico. The *criollos*, favorable to the movement at first, were frightened away. They wanted to rid the country of Spaniards that they might get into the saddle, not that the Indian should straighten his back and throw off his burdens.

The church called on the white Virgin of the Remedies to blast this dark rival of hers, who had such doubtful antecedents. She was carried in solemn procession from her shrine to the cathedral, declared *capitana general* of the royalist army

and given a marshal's baton. "Inevitably there arose an open antagonism between the two Virgins, who were protecting such contrary interests and they were seen on opposing fronts . . . It came to pass that while the Mexicans always respected Our Lady of the Remedies, although they could not forget the tremendous harm that she caused them during the Conquest, the Spaniards, who had not suffered any damage from Our Lady of Guadalupe, made her the target of their hates and even went so far as to shoot her several times."

Hidalgo was defeated. He was captured, unfrocked and excommunicated; then he, Allende and Aldama were shot and decapitated, their heads being taken to Guanajuato and hung in cages in the *Albóndiga*, or grain market, "as a warning to criminals who sacrifice themselves for the independence of their country."

Another village priest, the *mestizo* José María Morelos, took up the fight. He was an abler leader than Hidalgo and by 1813 he controlled so much of the country that he felt in a position to call a national congress. This formally declared Mexico independent, annulled caste distinctions and abolished slavery. The next year a liberal constitution was adopted.

In the meantime, however, Ferdinand VII had regained the Spanish throne and was stamping out liberalism at home and in his possessions. Morelos was captured, convicted by the Inquisition of every sin in its list and released to the secular arm to be shot. Of the original insurgents only one held out, the former muleteer, Vicente Guerrero, who kept up a stubborn guerrilla warfare in the southern mountains, where a state is now proud to have his name.

So far as surface appearances go, the *criollo* conservatives—clergy, military and politicians—took over the patriot cause. But theirs was essentially a separate revolution, having but one aim in common with that led by Hidalgo and Morelos: independence. Yet Morelos, for advocating that independence, had been condemned as "a traitor to God, King and Pope." The church's *volte-face* was due to another upheaval in Spain.

There mutinous troops had compelled Ferdinand to restore the liberal constitution of 1812. To Mexico's clerical hierarchy this was an intolerable state of affairs, since that constitution vested sovereignty in the people, a principle which the Inquisition had branded as manifest heresy. Priests and *políticos* joined forces and found among the military a leader to suit their book. This was the opportunist, Agustín de Iturbide, who while fighting Hidalgo and Morelos as a colonel in the royalist army had signalized himself by his wholesale executions of combatants and noncombatants alike.

Iturbide tricked the viceroy into giving him a command, appropriated half a million pesos which he was supposed to safeguard on its way to Acapulco and won over Guerrero, whom he had seen sent to subdue. At Iguala, the town of the goldsmiths below Taxco, he formulated the specious Plan of the Three Guarantees: Independence, Religion, Union. Mexico was to have a constitutional monarchy of her own. No religion but Catholicism was to be tolerated. *Criollos* were to be the equals of Spaniards. An obelisk under Iguala's tamarind trees commemorates the second, and maintained, Declaration of Mexico's Independence on February 24, 1821.

The Spanish crown's property rights in Mexico thereby passed to the Mexican state, and it was quite in accordance with established concepts that that state expelled all Spaniards and expropriated their property.

The year of independence Iturbide proclaimed himself emperor of Mexico.

But, irrespective of this *coup d'état*, the social revolution—the *Revolution*, we may say—had been defeated with the execution of Morelos. The economic domination of Indian and *mestizo* merely went from Spanish to *criollo* hands. The dark Virgin had lost.



## CHAPTER XI

# Poinsettia

IN DECEMBER 1839 two carriages drawn by mules stopped at the hacienda of Manga de Clavo, "Clove Spike," on the road between Vera Cruz and Jalapa. In them, bound for Mexico City, were Spain's first minister to independent Mexico, Calderón de la Barca, and his wife. Their host was a Mexican general, described by Madame Calderón de la Barca in a letter as "a gentlemanly, good-looking, quietly dressed, rather melancholy-looking person, with one leg, apparently somewhat of an invalid. He has a sallow complexion, fine dark eyes, soft and penetrating, and an interesting expression of face. Knowing nothing of his past history, one would have said a philosopher, living in dignified retirement, one who had tried the world and found that all was vanity, one who had suffered ingratitude, and who, if he were ever persuaded to emerge from his retreat, would only do so, Cincinnatus-like, to benefit his country."

This cripple was Antonio López de Santa Anna, born forty-five years before, among the roses, poinsettias, azaleas, dahlias, geraniums, zinnias, carnations, begonias, orchids and orange blossoms of Jalapa, "Water on the Sands." His father was a mortgage broker of Vera Cruz, who, like most well-to-do businessmen there, had his home in the old town four

thousand feet above the coast and *el vómito*, the bilious fever which seems not to have appeared in America until after the coming of the Spaniards.

School irked young Antonio. A clerk's job irked him. Church? Army? Law? A little more than three months before the *Grito de Dolores*, family influence secured for him an appointment as cadet in a crack Vera Cruz infantry regiment. At twenty-two he had so distinguished himself by his reckless bravery against rebels (a comprehensive term embracing Indians, Hidalgo sympathizers and Texans) that he had risen to the rank of captain, in spite of a lot of pother about a forged draft on his company's funds.

Santa Anna was stationed in Vera Cruz when Jalapa, Orizaba and Córdoba declared for Iturbide. Sent against the insurgents, he inflicted a defeat upon them in the morning, then joined them that afternoon. "I wished to aid with my grain of sand the great work of our political regeneration," he said, although there were some who ascribed this patriotic decision to the facts that by afternoon strong reinforcements had arrived for the insurgents and that Santa Anna received a promotion of one full rank when he switched sides. Thus he became a colonel, for the Spanish viceroy had made him a lieutenant upon hearing of the morning victory, and Santa Anna insisted that this was his rank when he joined the patriot cause.

Santa Anna was soon a popular hero among his new comrades. He received credit for the surrender by the Spaniards of Vera Cruz and became its military commander. He visited Mexico City and, in spite of his crudeness, was taken up by that society which was to shock the first United States minister to Mexico when he arrived in 1825. "There are certainly some young ladies (very few I am afraid) who do not smoke," wrote Mr Joel R. Poinsett; "some married women (many I hope) who have no lover, or if this would be interpreted to derogate from their charms, who consider him only as a convenient dangler, and are fondly and faithfully attached to



their husbands; and there are certainly many gentlemen who are not gamblers."

It wasn't long before capital society was watching with interest the suit of Santa Anna, age twenty-eight, for the hand of Iturbide's sister, age sixty. While treating the courtship as a joke, the emperor ordered the young man to attend to his soldiering. Because of this insult, and because by 1822 he had detected a shift in the wind, Santa Anna joined the old *mestizo* revolutionist, Guadalupe Victoria, in drawing up a plan for a republic. Deserted by his armies, Iturbide abdicated the next year, sailing into exile from Vera Cruz just as the throne which he had ordered from Europe was being unloaded.

If Santa Anna hoped to gain much by his share in the revolution he was disappointed. Guadalupe Victoria became presi-

dent under the constitution of 1824, a close copy of that of the United States, but Santa Anna, after escaping court-martial for misconduct and sword flashing in San Luis Potosí, was sent as governor to Mexico's jumping-off place, Yucatán. There he began laying plans for an invasion of Cuba, only to see his scheme frustrated by the protests of Great Britain and the United States.

These two nations were contesting for the trade of Mexico and the other Spanish-American republics, with the United States making a poor showing. Even before Mr Poinsett presented his credentials, Mexico had come to look on her land-hungry Northern neighbor with suspicion. Then the British chargé d'affaires, H. G. Ward, expressed his conviction "both publicly and privately, that the great end of Mr Poinsett's Mission" was to "embroil Mexico in a civil war, and to facilitate, by doing so, the acquisition of the provinces to the north of the Río Bravo by the United States."

Ward was one of the men sent overseas by George Canning, who, on becoming foreign minister in 1822, had seen the opportunity for British commercial interests and had secured recognition of the Mexican republic as early as possible. "Spanish America is freed," he had written, "and if we do not mismanage our affairs sadly *she is ours*." Ward did not mismanage his errand. Mexican officialdom found him *simpático*, as did the Countess Regla, mistress of Guadalupe Victoria. Through the countess he became influential in Mexico's internal politics. He traveled into almost every part of the country, surveying its economic resources.

Both Poinsett and Ward wrote books about Mexico, of course. We have had a stricture on Mexican society from the South Carolinian's "Notes on Mexico," indicative, I think, of the man's attitude. The way Mr Ward's mind was running may be seen in a passage from "Mexico in 1827," in which he reports on the "demoralizing effect among the Indian population" produced by the exorbitant fees for the ministrations of the Church. The bagman of the British Empire, with as good

a head for figures as Bernal Díaz, would want it explained that two *reales* is equivalent to about twelve and a half cents in United States currency.

"For instance," he writes, "in states, where the daily wages of the laborer do not exceed two *reales* and where a cottage can be built for four dollars, its unfortunate inhabitants are forced to pay twenty-two dollars for their marriage fees, a sum which exceeds half their yearly earnings, in a country where feast and fast days reduce the number of *días útiles* (on which labor is permitted) to about one hundred and seventy-five. The consequence is that the Indian either cohabits with his future wife until she becomes pregnant (when the priest is compelled to marry them with or without fees) or, if more religiously disposed, contracts debts and even commits thefts, rather than not satisfy the demands of the ministers of that religion, the spirit of which appears to be so little understood.

"Throughout the bishopric of Valladolid the marriage fees vary from seventeen to twenty-two dollars. In La Puebla, Durango and Mexico they are from fourteen to eighteen dollars, according to the supposed means of the parties; and these enormous sums are extorted from the meanest parishioners.

"The fees on baptisms and burials are likewise very high. In the mining districts each miner pays weekly to the Church half a *real* (a *medio*) in order to provide for expenses of his funeral; and on the day of the *raya* (the weekly payment) an agent of the *Cura* is always present to receive it. Thus twenty-six *reales*, or three dollars and two *reales* (thirteen shillings English money), are paid annually by each mining laborer, in full health and employment, in order to secure the privilege of a mass being read over his body upon his decease. An Indian, who lives ten years under such a system, would pay six pounds ten shillings for the honor of a funeral, and yet would not be exempt from continuing his contributions, although the amount paid in one year, ought more than to cover any fees that could reasonably be claimed by the Church."

I am sure that Ward's commercial reports were models of

their kind. Although considerable German capital entered Mexico at this crucial period and the French gained a hold on commerce, the giant's share of Mexican trade, both wholesale and retail, went—thanks largely to Ward—to Great Britain. British capital poured into the mining industry. Real economic penetration of Mexico by the United States did not begin until late in the century, during the Díaz dictatorship.

Regardless of the truth or falsehood of Ward's allegations concerning the mission of Joel Roberts Poinsett, the latter was devoid of tact and, like too many of our representatives in Mexico thereafter, he felt called on to show the Mexicans, in a superior big-brother fashion, how democratic institutions should function. It was he who preached the gospel of republicanism to Czar Alexander of Russia, receiving the reply: "You are quite right, Mr Poinsett, and you may rest assured that if I were not emperor I would be a republican." In order to bolster the liberal cause in Mexico, Poinsett introduced the Masonic York Rite Lodge, in opposition to the old Scottish Rite Lodge, which stood there for centralism in government.

Rivalry between the two orders was a national issue when in 1825 Santa Anna, relieved of the governorship of Yucatán, went to Manga de Clavo to lead the life of a country gentleman for a while with Doña Inés, the "classic example of Vera Cruz womanhood," who had brought him a dowry of six thousand pesos in property. At the same time he kept an eye on politics. His natural affiliations were with the *criollos*, who resented the predominance of *mestizos* in the new government. It has been established that he was a Scottish Rite Mason. But the *criollo* candidate in the next election was Gómez Pedraza, who as minister of war had encouraged Santa Anna in the Cuban venture, remarking that "if it were a success it would be fine for the nation; while, if Santa Anna were killed or ruined, the republic would still be the winner." So Santa Anna threw his support to Vicente Guerrero and, upon being threatened by Gómez Pedraza with trial on charges of misconduct, led a revolt in favor of the *mestizo*. The latter

was defeated at the polls, but troops in the capital followed Santa Anna's lead and "pronounced" for him. President-elect Gómez Pedraza fled and congress declared Guerrero president, thus setting a precedent for future unsuccessful candidates.

For his services Santa Anna was promoted to the rank of general of division and made governor of Vera Cruz. The citizens of the port had scarcely finished reading his proclamation about an olive branch when they found themselves called on to make a voluntary loan of seven thousand pesos. Soon another, this time of twenty thousand pesos, had to be made, for Santa Anna had seen a chance to get in the limelight again. The Spaniards, who still held San Juan de Ulúa, had been watching events in Mexico closely, in the hope of taking advantage of the factionalism. When the time seemed ripe, in the summer of 1829, an expeditionary force landed at Tampico. With much fanfare Santa Anna was upon them. It was far from being a glorious engagement on either side. The Mexicans were poorly equipped, the Spaniards stricken by fever. After a summer of spasmodic fighting, truces and negotiations, however, the enemy surrendered and Santa Anna's fondest hopes were realized. He was hailed throughout Mexico as the victor of Tampico and the Gulf port was officially renamed Santa Anna de Tamaulipas.

As a consequence of this popularity people praised him for remaining true to his principles when, perhaps because of an error in calculation, he took no part in the overthrow of Guerrero by Vice-President Anastasio Bustamante. Mexico had held two elections under her new constitution and in each case the vice-president had started a revolution. Another precedent established.

An immediate result of this change was the hasty return to the United States of Mr Poinsett, whose recall had been asked for by President Guerrero. He was followed by Anthony Butler, whose only qualifications for the post, according to

Justin Smith, were "an acquaintance with Texas and a strong desire to see the United States obtain it."

Santa Anna was soon confiding in a friend: "I do not know of any other question of public interest now in agitation than the approaching *elections of president* and vice-president. When that period shall arrive, should I obtain a majority of suffrages, I am *ready to accept* the honor, and to sacrifice, for the benefit of the nation, my repose and the charms of private life. My fixed system is *to be called*, resembling in this a modest maid, *who rather expects to be desired, than to show herself to be desiring.*"

The "modest maid" bribed the officer in charge of the Vera Cruz garrison to revolt, then, the moment seeming auspicious, took command of the rebels, marched into Mexico City in 1833, ousted Bustamante and put in his place Gómez Pedraza, whom he had prevented from assuming office four years before. After a parade, in which Santa Anna noticed that all the cheers were for the victor of Tampico and that the new president was almost overlooked, he returned to his hacienda, lest it become too evident that Gómez Pedraza was his cat's-paw. In the next election things worked out according to plan and Santa Anna received an overwhelming majority of votes for president.

The inauguration was set for April 1, 1833, and Mexico City looked forward to a gala occasion: parades, floats, military bands, fireworks, bread and circuses. The great day came—and Santa Anna did not appear. He sent word from Manga de Clavo that, as a result of his arduous campaigning in his country's service, his feet were in such an irritated condition that he could not put on his shoes!

It will always remain a mystery how much of the man's physical disability was real, how much assumed to obtain public sympathy, hold attention, excite speculation and provide surprises. Whatever the truth, Santa Anna must be rated as one of the world's master showmen.

Vice-President Gómez Farías (a civilian, hence harmless)



took over and launched a liberal program, directed particularly at restriction of the power of the army and clergy. This was playing with dynamite and, while there is no reason to believe that Gómez Farías took a single step without Santa Anna's approval, the latter was careful not to commit himself openly. Even after crushing the ensuing revolt he obtained six months' leave from congress and went back to Manga de Clavo "for the sake of his health." His observation of the country's cool reception of the reforms caused him to remake his whole announced political philosophy and to come out as a conservative of the conservatives. Gómez Farías went into exile and Santa Anna entered Mexico City in 1834, the savior of clergy and military.

Still Caesar did not put out his hand for the crown, but retired to his hacienda, leaving another puppet to manipulate congress, so that the constitution might be overhauled and the people prepared for the legal establishment of a despotism. Everything was going smoothly when fate turned against her favorite. Santa Anna went to straighten things out in Texas. He returned neither hero nor martyr but a rather ludicrous figure. He published a vigorous report on the Texas campaign, insisting that he "would have suffered a thousand deaths" before subscribing to any agreement in Texas containing the remotest reflection upon Mexico's honor, condemning too various Mexican officers for their ineptitude and implying that the blame for the disaster was not his.

Mr Poinsett had sent him a message: "Say to Santa Anna that when I remember how ardent an advocate he was of liberty ten years ago I have no sympathy for him now, that he has gotten what he deserves." Replied Santa Anna: "Say to Mr Poinsett that it is very true that I threw up my cap for liberty with great ardor and perfect sincerity, but very soon found the folly of it. A hundred years to come my people will not be fit for liberty. They do not know what it is, unenlightened as they are, and under the influence of a Catholic clergy; a despotism is the proper government for them, but

there is no reason why it should not be a wise and virtuous one."

Santa Anna was not heard from for eighteen months thereafter. Then fate gave him a chance for a "comeback" in a war often overlooked in Mexican history: the French Pastry War of 1838.

Five years or so before, Mexican soldiers on a spree had wrecked a bakery belonging to a Frenchman. The damage amounted to possibly a thousand pesos, but when the French government got around to presenting a bill through diplomatic channels the sum had grown to sixty thousand pesos. This, with other claims of like nature, gave a total of six hundred thousand pesos which La Belle France wanted paid at once. A French fleet appeared off Vera Cruz and declared a blockade of the Mexican ports, finally opening fire on San Juan de Ulúa. The walls began to crumble and the commanders of the fortress and of Vera Cruz made a truce with the French.

When Santa Anna, as hero of the last foreign invasion, dashed down to Vera Cruz to offer advice, he found the commanders only too willing to shift responsibility. While he had to agree that the only course was to surrender the fortress, he let the nation know that this was being done only to save Mexican lives. The nation also got the idea from his proclamation that such a situation had come about through the incompetence of the commanders. They were recalled and Santa Anna was given the task of defending Vera Cruz.

Before daylight the next morning the French admiral sent a raiding party ashore to capture Santa Anna. The city gate had to be forced open with a petard. The noise awoke Santa Anna, who grabbed part of his clothes and dashed downstairs, only to meet the French as they entered the house. Laughing at his appearance, they let him pass after asking him which was Santa Anna's room. He rushed outside the city, gathered together a band of refugees and attacked the French as they were re-embarking. To cover their retreat they had placed a

captured cannon, loaded with grape, at the end of the street. As Santa Anna galloped up at the head of his men this gun was discharged, killing his horse and wounding him in the left hand and leg. The leg wound proved so serious that a conference of physicians agreed upon amputation. The operation was set for the next day, and Santa Anna anesthetized himself by composing a report to the minister of war, in which he related that he had charged the enemy at the head of his men and had driven them into their boats at the point of the bayonet.

"We conquered, yes, we conquered, Mexican arms secured a glorious victory; and the flag of Mexico remained triumphant. I was wounded in this last effort and probably this will be the last victory that I shall offer my native land. On closing my career . . ."

The farewell was premature. Only the amputated limb was buried at Manga de Clavo, to which its owner was carried for convalescence under the care of Doña Inés. The surgeons had been clumsy with knives and saw, however, and there is no doubt that Santa Anna suffered intermittent pain throughout his life. It was pain well endured. He was the national hero again. San Jacinto was forgotten; only Tampico and Vera Cruz were remembered. Although most of the French demands were met in the treaty ratified the following March, the public, under the spell of Santa Anna's deathbed phrases, remained convinced that a great victory had been won at a cost which verged on a national tragedy. When Santa Anna, after having relieved Bustamante of the presidency for a time, returned to Manga de Clavo "for the sake of his health," only a few small souls carped at his taking with him a million pesos out of the national treasury.

During this interlude Santa Anna received the new Spanish minister and his lady.

"It was only now and then that the expression of his eye was startling, especially when he spoke of his leg, which is

cut off below the knee. He speaks of it frequently, like Sir John Ramorny of his bloody hand, and when he gives an account of his wound, and alludes to the French on that day, his countenance assumes that air of bitterness which Ramorny's may have exhibited when speaking of 'Harry the Smith.'" Madame Calderón de la Barca adds: "To judge from the past, he will not long remain in his present state of inaction."

Events proved her right, for Mexico was about to witness "the apotheosis of a leg."

Taking leave of Santa Anna after an inspection of his gamecocks, the Calderón de la Barcas proceeded over a route about which we are going to hear a great deal from motorists one of these days, when the Jalapa road is paved to its junction with the Pan American Highway between Puebla and Tehuacán. Ladies are going to mention in their letters the things that Madame Calderón de la Barca mentioned in hers:

"Palms, cocoas, oranges, lemons . . . One circumstance must be observed by all who travel in Mexican territory. There is not one human being or passing object to be seen that is not in itself a picture, or which would not form a good subject for the pencil . . . Salvator Rosa and Hogarth might have traveled here to advantage, hand in hand; Salvator for the sublime, and Hogarth taking him up where the sublime became the ridiculous . . . A distant view of the sea . . . pineapples and granaditas, which are like Brobdingnagian gooseberries, the pulp enclosed in a very thick yellow or green rind, and very refreshing . . . a delicious smell of flowers, particularly of roses . . . Jalapa, old and gray and rose becovered . . . We had the advantage of clear weather not always to be found at Jalapa, especially when the north wind, blowing at Vera Cruz, covers this city and its environs with a dense fog . . . Everywhere there are flowers—roses creeping over the old walls, Indian girls making green garlands for the Virgin and saints, flowers in the shops, flowers at the windows, but above all, everywhere one of the most splendid

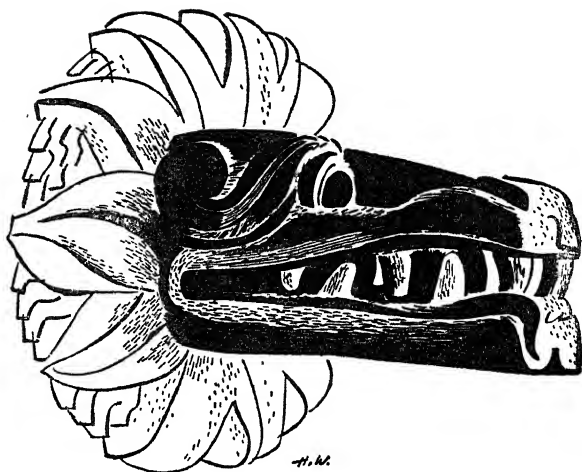
mountain views in the world. The Cofre de Perote, with its dark pine forests and gigantic *chest* (a rock of porphyry which takes that form), and the still loftier snow-white peak of Orizaba, tower above all the others . . . the surrounding lanes shaded by fruit trees; aloes, bananas, chirimoyas, mingled with the green liquidambar, the flowering myrtle . . . Large scarlet blossoms, and hanging purple and white flowers, and trees covered with fragrant bell-shaped flowers like lilies, which the people here call the *floripondio*, together with a profusion of double pink roses that made the air fragrant as we passed . . .”

Her purple and white flowers may have been maurandias, one of whose species has purple blossoms shading to lavender, with white throats. The scarlet flowers were doubtless the Mexican *flores de pascua*, “Christmas flowers,” seeds of which Mr Poinsett took home with him. Madame Calderón da la Barca was writing on Christmas Eve from Puebla.

“ . . . roses and carnations . . . Gradually the vegetation changed. Fine, fresh-looking European herbage and trees succeeded the less hardy though more brilliant trees and flowers of the tropics. The banana and chirimoya gave place to the strong oak, and higher still, these were interspersed with the dark green of the pine . . . The ground for about two leagues was covered with lava and great masses of black calcined rock, so that we seemed to be passing over the crater of a volcano. This part of the country is deservedly called the *mal país*, and the occasional crosses with their faded garlands, that gleam in these bleak, volcanic regions, give token that it may have yet other titles to the name of ‘the Evil Land’ . . . the dismal old town of Perote . . . with its old castle of San Carlos and cold, sterile plains . . . The captain seemed to think it extremely probable that we should be robbed . . . *mal país*, where nothing is to be seen but a few fir trees and pines, dark and stunted, black masses of lava, and an occasional white cross to mark either where a

murder has been committed or where a celebrated robber has been buried. Of each, Don Miguel gave us a succinct account. Some lines of *Childe Harold* suit this scene as if written for it:

*"These are memorials frail of murderous wrath,  
For wheresoe'er the shrieking victim hath  
Pour'd forth his blood beneath the assassin's knife  
Some hand erects a cross of mouldering lath;  
And grove and glen with thousand such are rife,  
Throughout this purple land, where law secures not life."*



## CHAPTER XII

# The Bandits of Río Frío

ANGELS are said to have helped the Franciscan Motolinia select the site of Puebla, on a plain flanked by volcanoes: Orizaba on the east, Popocatepetl and Ixtaccihuatl on the west and on the north triangular Malinche, above the pulque-producing plains of Apam. Founded to safeguard communication between Mexico City and the coast, Puebla de los Angeles rivaled the capital and Guadalajara for a time, but with the development of the north Monterrey pushed it down into fourth place among Mexican cities. In 1839 Puebla was known as a *gachupín* city, staunchly Catholic and reactionary. Madame Calderón de la Barca comments on its cleanliness, calling it in this respect the Philadelphia of Mexico, but I do not believe she makes a single mention of majolica,

whereas Puebla was the first city of New Spain to manufacture the famous Talavera ware and nowadays, when even filling stations and rest rooms glisten with polychrome tiles, feminine visitors are carried away with the beauty of it. (Watching ladies in the La Luz factories as they order quantities of the glazed blue and white or blue and yellow squares shipped back home, for use on fountains and fishponds and fireplaces, I wonder how these will look when seen through the eyes of Texas. A lady points to a mosaic of Don Quixote tilting at the windmills. "Oh, I must have one of that funny little man! What's he doing?")

Beyond Puebla the motorist follows a slightly different route from that taken by the Calderón de la Barca diligence in reaching Río Frío, just below the summit of the divide between the plains and the Valley of Mexico. The highway, completed in 1926, during the Calles administration, touches Cholula, where goats nibble grass on the sides of Quetzalcoatl's pyramid and electric lights outline the cross of the shrine of the Virgin of the Remedies on its top, then passes through Huejotzingo.

At Huejotzingo, I hear, a twentieth-century lady with Madame Calderón de la Barca's professed fear of bandits thought her hour had come when she was caught up in a melee of shouting men in bizarre costumes. It was carnival time, just before Ash Wednesday, and she had blundered into one of Mexico's most exciting folk dramas. The hero is Agustín Lorenzo, a gentleman of the road of viceregal days. Once a year the men of Huejotzingo put on uniforms, many of them anachronistic Zouave outfits, and give chase to Lorenzo. The latter and his followers hold up coaches, swoop down on pack trains carrying the king's silver to Vera Cruz and, as a grand and glorious climax, abduct a beautiful señorita. Only then may Lorenzo be captured. The frantic father discovers what the small boys of the town have been bursting to tell him: that his daughter has loved the outlaw all the time, has climbed down from the balcony of the



Palacio Municipal into his arms and has married him in a most respectable manner.

I have always suspected some good friar of having done what he could do to elevate this horseplay by insisting that his charges adapt it to an ending of his own. It was primarily to get their books by the censors of the Inquisition that Spanish picaresque novelists concluded every adventure of their rogues with a homily—which the reader could always skip.

"At Río Frío, which is about thirteen leagues from Mexico, and where there is a pretty good *posada* in a valley surrounded by woods, we stopped to dine," continues Madame Calderón de la Barca. "In front of the house, some Indians were playing at a curious and very ancient game—a sort of swing, resembling *el juego de los voladores*, 'The game of the flyers,' much in vogue among the ancient Mexicans. Our French hostess gave us a good dinner, especially excellent potatoes, and jelly of various sorts, regaling us with plenty of stories of robbers and robberies and horrid murders all the while.

"On leaving Río Frío, the road became more hilly and covered with woods, and we shortly entered the tract known by the name of the Black Forest, a great haunt for banditti, and a beautiful specimen of forest scenery, a succession of lofty oaks, pines and cedars, with wild flowers lighting up their gloomy green . . ."

No, the party, having a formidable escort, was not held up, but Madame's heart was in her brodequins, she would have the relative to whom she wrote that letter believe. Possibly because I was looking for it, I detected pique, just a little pique, between her lines the first time I read them. Back on the other side of Puebla her husband had asked an innkeeper how the bandits treated the women who fell into their power. "*Las saludan*," was the answer, "and sometimes carry them off to the mountains, but rarely, and chiefly when they are afraid of their giving information against them."

Today one will find neither Frenchmen nor inns at Río

Frío, only service stations on one side of the highway and on the other open-air *fondas* where good *tacos* may be had in lieu of potatoes and jelly. The *Volador* ceremony, in which four men go whirling heads downward on ropes attached to the top of a pole perhaps fifty feet high, may be witnessed by the lucky or indefatigable explorer in the Sierra de Puebla, between the states of Vera Cruz and Puebla, but never in Río Frío. No longer is the talk there of "robberies and horrid murders," but of automobile accidents—and upon investigation these almost always prove to have been greatly exaggerated or to have occurred in that place one is forever hearing about in Mexico: *más adelante*. "On ahead" the roads are always terrible and there is never any gasoline to be had.

Yet that region between the White Woman and seldom visited Mount Tlaloc retains the power, if not to chill, at least to titillate the imagination. Even for one unacquainted with its past the tree trunks, dark against the "gloomy green," conceal merry men who await, like the clansmen of Roderick Dhu, a whistle. In my simplicity I used to impress upon tourists passing through these forests that the days of banditry are over in Mexico. Finally it dawned upon me that nine out of ten were wondering how it would feel to be waylaid. Thereafter I tried to make each trip through the mountains a running of the gantlet by lifting episodes from a novel which might have been written for my purpose: *Los Bandidos de Río Frío*, by Manuel Payno.

In the *mal país* lines of *Childe Harold* ran through the head of Madame Calderón de la Barca. Many a Mexican could have matched her quotation for quotation, since romanticism met a fervent welcome when it crossed the Atlantic in the eighteen-thirties. Gray's *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard* was translated; Byron, Chateaubriand, Rousseau, Lamartine. Later the Spanish romanticists became popular: Espronceda, El Duque de Rivas, García Gutiérrez, José Zorrilla. Zorrilla, "the spoiled darling of Spanish romanticism," described by his tutor as "a lazy good-for-nothing" who "fre-

quented graveyards at midnight like a vampire and let his hair grow out like a Cossack," exerted a curious left-handed influence on Mexico which has never, I believe, been properly evaluated. He spent some time in the country, being appointed director of the Mexican National Theater by Maximilian. His play, *Don Juan Tenorio*, has been so completely Mexicanized that many Mexicans regard it as an indigenous product. Not that the Don Juan legend had a stronger appeal there than in Europe, but the second part of the play, with its graveyard setting, the ghost of Doña Inés, the statue that comes to life—to Mexicans that and not the seduction of the nun and the penitence of the libertine became the drama. I know that *Don Juan Tenorio* is presented in Spain and throughout Spanish America on the eve of All Souls' Day, but one who has not seen it played in Mexico—and it is played in virtually every theater in the republic—has missed something *raro y mexicano*, rare and Mexican.

Since the way to emancipation of the ego had been shown them by Europeans, Mexican men of letters tried for a time to get their bearings among melancholy Mediterranean ruins. The less said about the result, the better. European literary traditions at work in Mexico had produced two great figures: Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz and José Joaquín Fernández de Lizardi. Neither had stood aloof from Mexico.

Sor Juana, in the world Juana de Asbaje, is by far the most remarkable woman that Spanish America has known. She was born in 1651, centuries ahead of her time, in Nepantla, a little pueblo at the foot of Popocatepetl on the Amecameca-Cuautla road. As precocious as she was beautiful, she was reading at the age of three and at eight composed a panegyric for the Holy Sacrament. She learned Latin in twenty lessons and tore her hair when her parents would not let her dress as a man and attend the University of Mexico, which had come into being by imperial decree in 1551 and had been inaugurated two years later. News of this prodigy soon reached the viceroy, who summoned Juana to Mexico City

and made her lady in waiting to his wife. To test her learning, he invited forty of New Spain's foremost theologians, scholars and authors to examine her. She confounded them all, "as a royal galleon would repel the attack of some little boats." Although Juana eclipsed all the beauties of the court she refused every offer of marriage—because of hopeless love for the viceroy, Mexico will have it. At seventeen she astounded everyone by taking the veil and, as Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, concentrating on writing, music, painting and the study of philosophy. At this period she wrote her famous poem *On the Inconsequence of Men*. Suddenly she gave up all these interests and devoted the rest of her life to charity, dying during an epidemic in Mexico City.

While Sor Juana's verse followed Castilian models, one can see in it how Mexico, Indian Mexico, was injecting its own gentle, tasteful, melancholic spirit into Spanish literature.

*El Periquillo Sarniento*, the first important Mexican novel, was the work of Fernández de Lizardi, who under the name of *El Pensador Mexicano*, "The Mexican Thinker," was the champion pamphleteer of the days of the War of Independence. Part of his masterpiece appeared in 1816 but was suppressed by the Spanish government because it advocated abolition of slavery. It was published in its entirety in 1830-31. *El Periquillo Sarniento* is a picaresque novel, its form a faithful copy of Le Sage's *Gil Blas de Santillana* and, through the French work, of the Spanish tales of roguery so popular during the Golden Age. True, the setting is Mexico, the characters are Mexican, the language is so Mexican that a glossary has to be appended for the use of the rest of the Spanish-speaking world. *El Periquillo Sarniento* has been called the Mexican classic, the greatest book produced by Latin America, one of the greatest books in the Spanish language; but I have noticed that most of those who are so lavish with their praise are primarily students of the social scene. As a sociological document, *El Periquillo Sarniento* is invaluable. As a novel, I for one find it too didactic to be

readable, although in fairness to the Mexican product I will say that it is no worse in this respect than its Spanish cousins.

In *Don Fernando* W. Somerset Maugham has something to say about this genre which should be smuggled between the leaves of every textbook on Spanish literature:

"Edgar Wallace is better than all the picaresque novelists put together. Not only are the crimes he deals with on a grander scale, but he shows a vivacity of invention, a power of suspense, a feeling for the picturesqueness of life, that none of them approached. It would not be so very surprising if the critics of the future neglected the serious novels of our day in favor of detective stories, and in the histories of literature pointed out the variety of Edgar Wallace's characters and the raciness of his conversations."

So far as I am concerned, that takes care of *El Periquillo Sarniento*.

It was a new awakening for Mexican romanticists to discover that Mexico had history and legend of her own to be explored. Ignacio Rodríguez Galván wrote *Muñoz, Visitador de México*, the country's first drama of the modern type, and the poem which is his masterpiece, *Profecía de Guatimoc*. Vicente Riva Palacio and Juan de Dios Peza composed in collaboration *Tradiciones y Leyendas Mexicanas*. The eighteenthies brought *Astucia* by Luis G. Inclán and Manuel Payno's *El Fistol del Diablo*, "The Devil's Stickpin," novels of banditry which happily combine romanticism with the realism of the picaresque tales, but are unburdened by the latter's moralizing.

These novelists had hit on a rich vein. Due to the chaotic condition of the country and the instability of the central government, banditry had reached enormous proportions. Almost every region was terrorized by one or more of the guerrilla bands described by Carlota in a letter to the Empress Eugénie:

"Theirs is a kind of spontaneous generation. As I understand the circumstances, a man leaves his village with a horse,

a weapon and the firm determination to acquire riches by any means except work. He has abundant audacity and a certain disregard for his own safety. If he gets shot it will not matter, for life is dull anyway and the only thing he cares about is lucrative adventure. Such a fellow as this has little trouble recruiting others of the same kidney. (We have here a shifting population with just the right propensities.) They plunder the first hacienda they come to; this achievement constitutes their baptism into the bandit profession. Newspapers make the most of it and lend importance to the band by reporting all its escapades in a given region. The robbers grow bolder and next hold up a stagecoach, carrying off a few rich people who can be held for ransom, and retreating over unknown trails across the sierras into some remote district. Here another band, and sometimes a third, can be found in hiding. Likely as not they all merge, swelling in number from a handful to several thousand."

In 1888 Manuel Payno, one time army officer and minister of the treasury, published the most famous of all the bandit yarns. "Payno took no special pains with *Los Bandidos de Río Frío*," says Julio Jiménez Rueda in his history of Mexican literature. "He lets his pen move tranquilly, without worrying about niceties of style, which will never be found in his pages. But the very naturalness with which he writes is one of his greatest charms. Besides, he endows his work with a pleasing humor which makes him an excellent conversationalist. Through his novels pass representatives of all social classes of the Mexico of the second third of the nineteenth century. Politicians, lawyers, doctors of the university, generals, workmen, shopkeepers, physicians, water vendors, humble mechanics. Many of his characters are faithful portraits of persons of the period whom Payno knew and put into his work with an admirable minuteness of detail."

*Los Bandidos de Río Frío* may not be great literature, of course it isn't, but it comes near to being a national institu-

tion. A Mexican motion picture has been made from it. I saw it burlesqued recently at Mexico City's Folies Bergères (a theater not as French as it sounds), with the action transferred to the front of a well-known tourist hotel on Juárez Avenue and with the bandits modernized into doormen, taxicab drivers and shine boys. In this version La Cesari was a singer, but not in opera.

If the most famous episode in the novel is based on an actual happening about which none but the participants knew the details, Río Frío must have had its first and last taste of grand opera a year or so before Madame Calderón de la Barca came through there. She saw La Cesari as Romeo in 1841 and states that the actress had not appeared upon the stage for the past three years. The chances are that her last performance had been at Río Frío.

An Italian troupe had had a highly successful engagement at the Teatro Principal, Mexico City's only theater, Payno tells us. Even boys in the streets were whistling operatic arias. Politics were in abeyance while citizens argued the comparative merits and charms of the two prima donnas: the statuesque soprano, Marietta Albini, who evoked "not only frenzied applause, but tears, sighs, hand squeezings and moans" in her role of Norma; and the voluptuous Neapolitan contralto, Adela Cesari, who made the audience applaud "not only with their hands, but with their feet, canes, benches, with everything that would make a noise" when she appeared in *The Constable of Chester*. (Madame Calderón de la Barca admits that La Cesari was beautiful, but says that she had mustaches.) Two parties came into being: the Albinistas, representing the people, and the Cesaristas, the aristocrats. The avowed leader of the latter was the Conde de la Cortina, "never too old for love," who had sent Adela a silver chest containing brilliants worth five thousand pesos, while it was generally understood that the Conde de Regla stood as patron to the powerful popular party. On La Albini's opening night three of his lackeys had gone up the aisles at the end of the

second act, each carrying a thousand newly minted pesos in a silk purse. The rivalry took the form of shouted insults after each performance, fisticuffs and sometimes serious duels between men of rank. "Not Guelphs and Ghibellines in Italy, nor York and Scottish Rite Masons in Mexico, had detested each other more or caused more disturbance."

At last, however, the company's engagement was at an end and on "a day of mourning" Mexico City saw the artists' diligences preparing to depart for Vera Cruz. With the exception of a little gold for use on the road, their money (and they had made a small fortune) had been converted into bills of exchange or sent ahead under convoy, for the bandit situation was a public scandal at the time. There was bad blood between the governor of Puebla and the minister of the interior, and each sought to throw the responsibility for the outrages on the other. Simultaneously, the governor had withdrawn state troops from every town along the highway and the minister had called in all federal soldiers between the capital and Vera Cruz. Evaristo had been left lord of the mountains.

Evaristo is not so romantically treated but what he may stand as the archtype of the Mexican bandit of that and earlier and later periods. He, like Santa Anna, is a symptom of society's ills, a purplish excrescence which at a distance looks more ornamental than healthy flesh. He is one of *Los de abajo*, the Underdogs, who were to make up the revolutionary armies of Pancho Villa. He and his lieutenant, Hilario, are brothers of Robin Hood and Little John, but they have been raised on *tortillas* and they are as Mexican as the maguey.

Río Frío was the base of Evaristo's operations. There he had set himself up as a charcoal burner, thus giving his band an innocent employment in case they fell under suspicion. He had spies all up and down the highway to give him word of the approach of travelers. Beggars in his pay accosted these, looked to see how well armed they were and passed the information on to him. "Travelers had become so resigned



that as soon as the coachman halted his mules they piled out of the diligence, emptied their purses into the hands of Evaristo and Hilario and humbly lay prone on the ground. The bandits, taking advantage of this meekness and grown arrogant with impunity, were in the habit of kicking their unfortunate victims as they left them with scarcely their underclothes to keep them from freezing; and if women were bold enough to attempt passage through the mountains, gossips said, although with much reserve, that they fared either very well indeed or very badly, for the masked ones had become rather fond of the fair sex."

But the Italians. "Rob these nightingales, these larks from the gardens of heaven? Touch these beauties escaped from the museums of Rome? Impossible!" Albinistas and Cesaristas joined forces and petitioned the military commander to give the diligences an escort to the coast. He agreed and when the singers took leave of the admirers who had accompanied them as far as Peñón Viejo spruce cavalymen had them in their safekeeping. At Ayotla, however, these were replaced by some ragamuffins on old nags which soon fell, literally, by the roadside, leaving the diligences to enter the mountains without any protection whatsoever. This was the revenge of the military commander who, "although a good *pater familias*," had had his attentions spurned, not only by the divas, but by every last one of the chorus girls.

"Upon observing that the escort had abandoned them, and the complete solitude of the highway, for oddly there happened on that day to be neither mule trains nor Indians with their little herds of burros, only sinister beggars (Evaristo's spies) who hobbled up to the doors and stuck their greasy straw sombreros inside as they asked for alms, terror overpowered the singers, and doubtless they were reviving in their own tongue memories of Fra Diavolo, when on entering a gloomy tract of woodland they heard the terrible cry: '*¡Alto ahí, grandísimos!*'"

"It was the usual and affectionate salutation of Evaristo."

The diligences were at once surrounded by masked men afoot and on horseback, brandishing clubs and pistols. The coachmen had drawn rein matter-of-factly, for some of them had been held up four times on one trip. "Although in no wise accomplices, they had long ago had to come to an understanding with the bandits in order to keep the stage line running and to save themselves from ill treatment and death." Furthermore the Conde de la Cortina had entrusted Mateo, the head coachman, with some gold pieces to soften the heart of Evaristo. So a few minutes later we find Mateo opening the door of the principal coach and respectfully giving his hand, in a dirty leather glove, to the divas.

"The captain is a friend of mine. He says to tell you that there's nothing to be afraid of, since you have given him willingly the little money you had."

"Here Evaristo nodded and glanced at his Indians, who lowered their clubs and retired a little ways.

"But," continued Mateo, "the captain wasn't able to attend the opera, as you can well imagine, having had too much to attend to day and night on the road. He wants you to sing for him one or two of your best numbers." The coachman dropped his voice. "You'd better do it, as that's easier than having your clothes taken off you. That's what Evaristo did to some prominent ladies of Puebla. And with others—El Conde de la Cortina charged me to take care of you, to let myself be killed rather than to permit—I told him I would answer with my head. So get out without trembling or showing fear. Otherwise . . ."

"The artists, calmer now, looked at one another and agreed that it was necessary to obey their savior, Mateo.

"Evaristo motioned to them to follow him and led the way to a group of magnificent trees, where they found an agreeable shade and a greensward covered with white and yellow daisies.



"Adela Cesari, who instead of being frightened was enjoying this adventure which had in it so much of the Italian, set the example by following Evaristo.

"Let's sing something which will leave a memory with these good robbers,' said she to her companions. 'Signor Galli will begin.'

"Galli, an elderly man, thin but straight and strong, with proof left of the virile handsomeness of his youth, had remained a silent observer, showing neither fear nor arrogance. Without saying a word he detached himself from the group, left the enclosure of trees and entered from the other side, as if he had been in the scenery of a theater, and with his powerful voice sang an aria . . . An aria from the *Pirate*? From *Mahomet II*? From *Semiramis*? ;*Quién sabe!* An aria inspired in him by the majesty of the deep forest, the solitude of the place, the plight of foreigners at the mercy of

numerous bandits, protected and defended only by the coachman of their diligence . . . Galli sang in the forest as he had never sung in the theater. Evaristo, having had no experience with the greatness of genius, might have been nailed motionless to the tree against which he was leaning. Unconsciously his masked comrades drew nearer, as if under the spell of this new Orpheus.

"When Galli had finished, La Cesari, dominated womanlike by these sentiments to a greater extent than Galli, presented herself upon this beautiful and savage stage, removed her silk hood and combs, threw her traveling cloak on the ground and, appearing a creature of fantasy, erect, beautiful, in a gown of sky-blue silk with a gold lace girdle, began to sing. What did she sing? Like Galli, improvisations, notes that no master ever wrote, throat exercises, trills and bird-of-paradise warblings never heard in any theater, wondrous melodies, golden drops that came in a cascade from the red and voluptuous lips of that queen of the forest, of that bewitching fugitive from the dark depths of the mountain.

"The trees were covered with birds that listened, rapt and silent and, when the harmonies had ceased, flew in a noisy flock to the tops of other trees, trying to imitate the notes which they had heard.

"Evaristo, moved by admiration rather than by sensuality, rushed to embrace the fair Cesari, but she stepped back and presented him with a soft and rosy cheek, where he placed a kiss that the birds must have heard.

"Evaristo attempted to go a little further. La Cesari drew back, extended a hand to stop him and fixed her great eyes imperiously on the bandit.

"'No more, signor.' Then, raising her head as if she were the captain, she led the travelers back to the diligence and ordered Mateo into the box.

"As the whip snapped and the mules moved forward La Cesari thrust her round arm out the door and graciously waved to the captain of the robbers of the mountain."



## CHAPTER XIII

# Vacilada and a Leg

OF THE COACHMAN who acted as impresario of that concert in Río Frío, Manuel Payno says: "Mateo was of that intelligent, bold and turbulent *mestizo* race which today makes up perhaps a third of the population of what used to be New Spain."

The novelist's estimate of the percentage of *mestizos* in the Mexico of the eighteen-eighties was a conservative one. In 1805 the population had been divided as follows:

Whites . . . . .	1,000,000: equal to 18 per cent of total
<i>Mestizos</i> . . . . .	2,000,000: equal to 38 per cent of total
Indians . . . . .	2,500,000: equal to 44 per cent of total

Mexicans had become that mixture of Indian and Spanish which Luis Urbina has described in his *Vida Literaria de México*:

"Physiologically we are neither the one nor the other; rather we are a well-differentiated ethnic type, partaking of the characteristics of both progenitory races. Both strive to coexist, even strive against each other in our organisms for survival. To the Sancho Panzan jollity and the Quixotic delirium are united in our hearts the sadness of the Indian, the ancestral submissiveness of a subject race, and the gentleness of the aborigine. And if we are Mexicans in life we are Mexicans in speech, in dreams and in song."

Spasmodic release from the tension of this inner struggle is found in caricaturing both heritages, in nose-thumbing at the universe, in the laughter of the *vacilada*.

"¿*Vacilada*?" says a character in Susan Smith's *The Glories of Venus*, to me the finest novel ever written on the Mexican scene. "I suppose it means, so far as it can be defined, the way in which the comic and the tragic are always overlapping in life. Mexicans like to emphasize that with a sort of swagger. They like to laugh bitterly and cry with a smiling grimace. *Vacilada* means that life is the greatest insult that can be offered to an intelligent human being, and yet if you will only accept that fact you can manage to enjoy yourself thoroughly a great deal of the time."

In the year that *Los Bandidos de Río Frío* was published a young man by the name of Guadalupe Posada left his home town of León in Guanajuato and came to Mexico City, where he got a job illustrating popular ballads for the printing house of Vanegas Arroyo, invented a technique of drawing with acid directly on zinc plates and became one of Mexico's great caricaturists. For the rest of that century and well into this one he put Mexican society through a *danse macabre*, laughing bitterly the while he dressed his roguish skeletons in silk hats and straw sombreros, in uniforms and in priestly

robes. He sat his gleaming white bones at banquet tables and made them dance about tequila barrels. He placed a skull in a cradle, another on a water closet: "Even here I shan't forget you."

Guadalupe Posada should have been alive to witness a ceremony which took place in the Santa Paula Cemetery of Mexico City on September 26, 1842, in the presence of braided officialdom and society's elite. A great military demonstration opened the proceedings. Then two files of grenadiers cleared a passage from a sumptuous hearse to a sumptuous, newly erected monument. Along this came the distinguished pallbearers, their burden a small crystal urn. Reverently the urn was placed on the capital of a gilded column covered with inscriptions. Over it a small stone cannon topped by the Mexican eagle came to rest.

Then Ignacio Sierra y Rosso delivered an oration: "Sweet, sweet and proper is it not only to die for the fatherland but to consecrate to it a certain kind of sacrifice which today we celebrate." He exhorted young soldiers to come to this spot and draw inspiration so that "when the bugle calls you can cut similar laurels." He declared that "the holy and terrible place" of this interment made his heart "burn with the fire of enthusiasm" as he contemplated the pride of the nation, the hero of Vera Cruz, the martyr, who like Thrasybulus, like Timoleon, like Leonidas at Thermopylae . . .

His audience too contemplated the hero, but Santa Anna, president-dictator since his *coup d'état* of the previous year, sat with downcast eyes and expression "of mingled pain and anxiety" on his face. "You would think him looking on a dying friend with whose sufferings he was deeply but helplessly sympathizing," writes an observer.

"Although the voracious scythes of time destroy this and a thousand other splendid monuments which the patria will consecrate to thy memory, thy name will last until the day in which this sun goes out and the stars and all the planets return to the chaos where formerly they slept."

It was over at last and the capital went home to take off its finery. Santa Anna's Leg, disinterred at Manga de Clavo, had been given formal burial.

Anonymous broadsides were soon on the streets. One of these pictured a meeting of the dead for the purpose of signing a petition to their congress, protesting against acceptance of this Leg into their midst. It might still carry some revolutionary germs that would disorganize their happy country, they stated. That would be bad enough, but it would be an unspeakable catastrophe if the revolution were successful and as a result they should find themselves ruled over by a Leg as yet unjoined by the rest of its body.

Meanwhile Santa Anna's legs (wooden leg number one and wooden leg number two, that is, as distinguished from the Leg) were basking in reflected glory.

"Having stopped in the carriage on the way home, at a shoemaker's," writes Madame Calderón de la Barca, "we saw *Santa Anna's leg* lying on the counter, and observed it with due respect, as the prop of a hero. With this leg, which is fitted with a very handsome boot, he reviews his troops next Sunday, putting his *best foot foremost*; for generally he merely wears an unadorned wooden leg. The shoemaker, a Spaniard . . . was arguing in a blustering manner with a gentleman who had brought a message from the general, desiring some alteration in the boot, and wound up by muttering, as the messenger left the shop, 'He shall either wear it as it is, or review the troops next Sunday without his leg!'"

That the Indian of pure blood is attuned to only certain elements of *vacilada*, such as its irony, may be demonstrated in the life of Benito Juárez.

The emergence of this Zapotec—the foremost individual of any race that Mexico has produced—was the fulfillment of copybook maxims on both sides of the Río Grande. Born March 21, 1806, in an adobe hut of Guelatao, "Deep Night," a village in the orange-growing region of the Sierra de Ixtlán, Oaxaca, he was orphaned at the age of three. Until his eleventh



year he knew no language but Zapotec. Then, because he feared punishment from his uncle for having let one of the sheep that he was tending be stolen from him, and because, in his own words, he had "a natural eagerness to become something," he walked into the city of Oaxaca, with no baggage but a cape of palm leaves, and found his sister, who was cook in the home of a Genoese merchant.

That green city was to become *his*, Oaxaca de Juárez. The bronze statue of him which watches over it from a hillside was the first sight pointed out to me by the little Zapotec who made himself my guide and mentor on my first visit there. "Benito Juárez," Serafín of the purple silk shirt said slowly, so that I should not miss the significance of his words. "Uno de los nuestros. (One of ours.) Do you know what he is saying? Al que no le guste a Oaxaca, que se vaya."

If anybody doesn't like Oaxaca let him get out!

That commendable spirit has always seemed to me to pervade the City of the Calabash Trees. Resistance to earthquake shocks, to cannon fire, to time, is in every line of its fortresslike buildings, constructed in the Mexican Moorish-Spanish style out of a green native stone which turns the color of jadeite during a rain.

In 1818 the city drowsed, to all appearances, in the seventeenth century. A bishop's seat, it was as steadfast a stronghold of reaction as Puebla and the faithful were on the lookout for youths who might be trained to combat the spread of heresy. The Italian merchant soon noticed the little Indian who had become a part of his kitchen and, impressed by his quick intelligence, called him to the attention of a kindly Franciscan who ran a book-binding business on the side. Benito became an apprentice in the shop while he learned Spanish by reading the *Lives of the Saints*. Unfortunately for Father Salanueva, who, despite the breach that opened between them, was always "godfather" to Juárez, this pupil went into the world of books as voraciously as his uncle's sheep into a fresh pasture. While he attended school, the prey

of the white city-bred boys, he was exhausting his protector's shelves. Little there to appeal to him except Plutarch, but the influence of that biographer is discernible in his speeches throughout his career. His thoughts must often have been in the high places of Greece and Rome the while he chanted prayers as he followed the Franciscan's crucifix on its daily procession through the streets. By the time he was enrolled in the Oaxaca Seminary, on the priestly path which had been chosen for him, he had looked elsewhere for reading material and had found Rousseau and Voltaire.

Soon he was at the parting of the ways. Characteristically, he did not hesitate. "When I finished my study of Latin grammar," he writes in his *Apuntes para Mis Hijos* (Notes for My Children), "my *padrino* was anxious for me to take up dogmatic theology, in order that during the following year I might begin to receive holy orders. This wish of his gave me great pain, because of the repugnance which I had to an ecclesiastical career." He left the seminary and entered the lay Institute of Arts and Sciences. There he read Benjamin Constant and the Venezuelan S. G. Roscio and began to take an active, although never noisy, part in politics.

He had come to what would have been for most young Indians a parting of the ways in another respect. His future—and he saw it pretty clearly when he began the study of law at twenty-two—was in cities, where the white man's culture ruled. It would have been easy, as well as advantageous, to slough off his racial ties as he had discarded his palm-leaf cape. But there is no indication that Juárez was tempted even for a moment to do so. Daybreak always found him in the market, listening to the Zapotec tongue, looking for some of his people of Guelatao. He would stay with them until class time, hearing home-town gossip and again and again the account of families and fields swallowed up by the large landowners. In the majority of the cases the swallower was the Church.

By the middle of the century the Church owned *not less*

*than one half of the real estate of Mexico*, with mortgages on most of the remaining agricultural properties.

A disciple of the anti-Christ, Juárez was soon to be called by the clergy. The impartial student of his speeches and acts will look in vain, however, for any hostility toward Catholicism itself. But the conviction had been borne in on him that the Indians could be lifted out of serfdom only by breaking up the millstone of *latifundia* and by putting an end to "the fatal collusion" of church and state.

Indians found him in a position to champion them when he obtained his degree of bachelor of law, admission to the bar and a place as junior in a legal firm. The Liberal party began to look to him as a leader while he served in the state legislature and rose from office to office. At the downfall of the Gómez Farías government in 1834 he had a brief taste of exile in Tehuacán, southeast of Puebla. Returning to his practice, he was jailed for encouraging a village to stand up for its rights.

Mexico meanwhile was becoming surfeited with Santa Anna. In 1844 a general pronounced against him and a Mexico City mob rushed to the cemetery, broke open the monument and the urn and dragged the Leg through the streets. It was finally rescued by the minister of war and buried in a "decent place." With the whole country about his ears, Santa Anna fled for the coast, only to fall into the hands of the Indians of Xico, south of Jalapa. Once he had been identified by his wooden leg, the villagers decided to treat both themselves and the authorities to a joke when they turned over their prize for a reward. Some gauged the capacity of a huge pot that was a householder's pride. Others went to the fields for choice banana leaves and chilies. Others discussed how long Santa Anna should be boiled in order that his flesh might be firm and sound for the spicing. The plan was to wrap him in banana leaves and deliver him to the authorities as a *tamal*. This design was frustrated by the village priest, who appeared with the holy vessel containing

the Host and prevailed upon his flock to surrender their captive alive.

Had Santa Anna foreseen the end that was in store for him, he would surely have told the priest not to interfere.

In June 1845 Santa Anna, sentenced to exile, was put aboard a ship at Vera Cruz. In August 1846 he was back in Mexico, by his own account summoned to take charge of his country's defense against the United States. "My wound, which broke out periodically, had me in bed, my good friends and my personal interest advised me to remain in retirement, but I could not resist an invitation of this kind, nor forget that I was a Mexican soldier, and I determined to accept it." The liberals had been driven to acquiesce in his return by the growing agitation for the establishment of a monarchy with a European prince on its throne. Also, while winning thousands of pesos from the Cubans with his gamecocks, Santa Anna had engaged in some obscure negotiations with President Polk, as a result of which the squadron blockading Vera Cruz received orders to let him pass. Apparently Polk had reason to believe that Santa Anna in power would be amenable to a settlement of the northern boundary controversy satisfactory to the United States.

The Mexican viewpoint with regard to this war has been expressed succinctly—and moderately—by the historian, Roa Bárcena:

"What caused the war with the United States? Mexico had declared that it would consider the annexation of Texas a *casus belli*. That annexation began to take place in 1844, and at the same time, giving as a reason defense against the raids of savage Indians, the North American forces occupied the territory up to the left bank of the Río Grande. Under the pretext of our opposition to recognizing the annexation of Texas, and another pretext of financial claims . . . our neighbor assumed the offensive and waged war against us with the little disguised purpose of assuring its conquest and

acquisition of the immense stretch of territory which, in addition to Texas, was yielded."

If Santa Anna did have any intentions of giving in to the United States he must have realized that it would be folly to open negotiations while the Mexican people were unanimously demanding resistance. In September he left the capital for San Luis Potosí, to start operations against Zachary Taylor.

If one may find words among Santa Anna's many to lend color to any interpretation of his acts, what problems Juárez presents are largely occasioned by his taciturnity in public. Writes a fellow delegate in the new congress which met in December 1846, and elected Santa Anna president by a narrow margin: "Juárez resembled a sphinx. If he opened his mouth it was to say 'Yes' or 'No.'" He was never in doubt which it was to be, however, and he made a telling speech in favor of a measure to raise a military chest on the security of church property.

The clergy resisted attempts by Vice-President Gómez Farías to enforce this law once it was passed and told Santa Anna, on his return from the disaster at Buena Vista in Coahuila, that they would hand over two million pesos in cash if it were repealed. Since this was a larger sum than could be secured by enforcement and since General Scott had landed at Vera Cruz, Santa Anna agreed. Before marching against the invaders he ousted Gómez Farías, cleared congress of anticlerical members, including Juárez, and put in a mouth-piece of his own as acting president.

There is a lamentable vagueness here among historians, but I believe it was at Cerro Gordo that the fourth Illinois regiment captured one of the legs—probably the one with the boot, which would have been left in the luggage. At least the *Jalapeños* show visitors the spot where the Northern soldiers used the trophy as a baseball bat. This is the leg about which legends were to cling like barnacles. Mr Negley Farson tells us that his grandfather told him that it was full of gold doubloons. . . .

While Santa Anna fell back on Mexico City and the United States army occupied Puebla, Oaxacan Liberals assumed control of the state and elected Juárez provisional governor.

A delegation from Guelatao waited upon him at his home. Said the spokesman in Zapotec: "We came to see you, Benito, in the name of your pueblo, to tell you that we are very glad you are governor. You know what our needs are and you will see that they are taken care of, for you are good and you won't forget us. We have nothing else to give you, so we want you to accept these presents in the name of all of us."

Chickens, corn, oranges and vegetables were laid upon the floor and each Indian, with grave straight-backed correctness, shook hands with the man who wore black city clothes but who had the long oval face and the flattened-out nasal curve of the Zapotecs, with the small hands and feet of the generality of Indians.

"Tzaquilzil, tata."

"I am a son of the pueblo and I shall not forget you. I shall uphold your rights."

During Juárez' administration Oaxaca was known as the model state of the nation. He found it not only bankrupt but heavily in debt; he left it with a surplus in the treasury. Francisco Bulnes, his harshest critic among historians, had to admit that "he knew no perfidy." Juárez was an inflexible foe of special privilege, so inflexible that when his infant daughter died he refused to contravene the health regulation which prohibited burial in churches. His wife, daughter of the ardent Catholic merchant who had befriended him, pointed out that the law made an exception in the case of the governor's family. She wept and pleaded with him. Juárez himself carried the little coffin to the public cemetery, "in order to set an example of obedience to the law."

Soon he had to consider a request from Santa Anna to be given command of the Oaxaca militia. The "Immortal Three Fourths," as wags were calling the cripple, was in one of his periodic eclipses. Scott's army, like Cortés', had met with no

resistance in its passage through the mountains. In an extremity the Mexicans had fought and lost at Contreras, Churubusco, Molino del Rey. Chapultepec had fallen, after a desperate defense by thirteen-, fourteen- and fifteen-year-old cadets of the National Military School. The last of these *Niños Héroes*, by wrapping the Mexican flag around his body and throwing himself from the bulwarks rather than let it fall into the hands of the enemy, had done more than any individual before him, probably more than any individual since, to weld Mexico into a nation. Santa Anna, charged with having sold out to the invaders, had been forced to give up his command and resign from the presidency. He had had no voice in the Treaty of Guadalupe, whereby Mexico lost territory exceeding half the entire area of the republic. Now he was awaiting court-martial in Tehuacán.

What he had in mind no one knows. He may have wanted to escape through Oaxaca into Guatemala. Juárez would not allow him to enter the state, explaining to his legislature that he feared Santa Anna's coming would be the signal for a revolution. Santa Anna ascribed the refusal to vindictiveness, cherished since 1828, when the general had visited Oaxaca and Juárez, barefooted, had waited on him at table.

Permitted to go into exile, Santa Anna had scarcely built a tomb for himself in South America when the way was opened for his restoration to power by a coalition of clergy, military and landowners, who advanced the old argument that Mexico needed a strong hand to prevent anarchy. In 1853 he became president again, then Most Serene Highness. The monument was repaired and the Leg ceremoniously put back into place, while Santa Anna raised money by selling a tract of land to the United States in the Gadsden Treaty and by selling Mayas to Cuban plantation owners at twenty-five pesos a head.

Juárez had taken refuge in New Orleans, where he earned a living by rolling cigars until 1855, when His Most Serene

Highness beat a precipitate retreat to South America and the mob got hold of the Leg again.

For Mexico and for Santa Anna a period was closing. Casting about for an epitaph for the man, I find no fairer one than that of Lucas Alamán:

“A combination of good and bad qualities, with very real natural ability but without either moral or intellectual training; a spirit with initiative, but without a fixed purpose or definite objective; with both energy and a disposition to rule, but handicapped by grave defects; skillful in making general plans for a revolution or campaign, but most unfortunate in directing a single battle . . . Santa Anna is without doubt one of the most notable characters which the American revolutions have developed.”

The period which was opening was that of Juárez, who returned to become a member of the cabinet of the Indian President Juan Álvarez and to father the Ley Juárez, which suppressed ecclesiastical and military courts for civil cases.

Under Álvarez' successor, black-bearded Ignacio Comonfort, the social revolution known as the Reform got under way. In the main a *mestizo* movement which derived its intellectual inspiration from the philosophers of French liberalism, it had as its primary objective the destruction of feudalism in Mexico. The bulwark of feudalism there being the Church, against the Church was directed the *Ley Lerdo* of 1856, prohibiting corporate holdings of real estate. All lands of the Church were to be sold, either to the tenants in occupation or to individuals who chose to “denounce” them. The Church was to receive compensation; the government was to collect a heavy sales tax.

The radical element among the liberals saw a nation of small property owners emerging from the breakup of the latifundia. Another group, including Secretary of the Treasury Miguel Lerdo de Tejada, drafter of the law, saw a



modern capitalistic state being shaped. Both were assuming that European property concepts were sound everywhere.

Few Mexicans could afford to buy the Church lands and pay the tax. Those who could were often dissuaded from doing so by the clergy. As a result foreigners stepped in, Anglo-Saxons, French and Germans, and formed a powerful capitalistic minority in Mexican society.

In another respect the law proved even more injurious to Mexico. Comonfort was in the common dilemma of liberals. He realized the necessity of breaking the economic power of the Church, yet he had no quarrel with Catholicism. His own mother was a devout Catholic, who pleaded the Church's cause. Largely in order to demonstrate that the purposes of the Lerdo Law were, as stated in its preamble, to increase governmental revenues and to stimulate economic progress, the president applied its provisions to all corporations, whether religious or civil. Thus the villages with communally owned lands were brought within its scope. Individuals, mostly *mestizos* unable to compete with foreigners in purchasing the Church lands, began to "denounce" village *ejidos*. Attempts to carry the law into execution in Indian communities resulted in a series of uprisings which forced the government to modify it. Division of the *ejidos* was made compulsory within the pueblos themselves. Thus private ownership was pressed upon a people who did not understand what it meant, that by putting a mark on a piece of paper—and receiving in exchange a few pesos or a jar of pulque—a man was losing possession of the land which he had always worked with his hands.

By virtue of this law the attack on the communal system of landholding, which did not take place on a large scale at the time, became a national program during the dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz, who in 1856 was drilling a National Guard unit down in Oaxaca.

The *Ley Lerdo* was written into the constitution of 1857, which also contained provisions against peonage and the ir-

revocability of monastic vows. The clergy preached a crusade and there ensued the savage Three Years' War, the first civil war in Mexican history in which the issue was between principles rather than personalities. The outcome was the triumph of the liberals and the elevation of Juárez to the presidency. He straightway drafted and promulgated the Reform Laws of 1859, nationalizing all church property, abolishing monastic orders, declaring the separation of Church and State and guaranteeing protection by the latter of worship in the Catholic or any other faith.

The die-hards among the conservatives looked abroad for help—at a moment when Europe was intent on issues in North America. Civil war was imminent in the United States and French, English and Spanish statesmen were backing the secessionists to win. The Colossus of the North would be dismembered, but it was an open secret what the further result would be: southward expansion and a vast Central American empire with Mexico as its center. The creation of such a Colossus of the South must be forestalled at any cost. The governments of Napoleon III, Queen Victoria and the Bourbon Isabella had claims against Mexico for damages sustained by their nationals during the civil wars. For the first time since its declaration the Monroe Doctrine might safely be disregarded. And in the summer of 1861 President Juárez, facing a bankrupt treasury, proclaimed a two years' moratorium on public debts, including those owed to foreign powers. Here was a pretext for intervention.

France, England and Spain hastily signed a treaty and sent troops to Vera Cruz. It became apparent at once, however, that to France this was more than a "bondholders' war" or a move to block a move from across the Rio Grande. Forced into the open, the French commander announced bluntly that his Zouaves were there because Napoleon III intended to establish a Mexican empire under his protection. He had been conferring with Abastida, the expelled archbishop of Mexico, and agents of the conservative party as to candidates

for the new throne. Realizing that they had been made cat's-paws in a scheme to emulate the first Napoleon, England and Spain withdrew.

Reinforced by legionnaires, the French marched inland. They attacked Puebla on May 5, 1862, but were beaten off by General Ignacio Zaragoza and his volunteers. The date was made a national holiday, *El Cinco de Mayo*, more in honor of Mexican heroism than because of the victory's importance, for after a long siege Puebla capitulated to General Bazaine. The guardian of the diocese welcomed the invaders with a *Te Deum* in the cathedral and excommunicated those who had opposed them.

Church bells rang as the French tramped into Mexico City, from which Juárez had transferred the capital to San Luis Potosí. One of the generals who was helping him organize resistance to the trained troops of Napoleon was Porfirio Díaz, most of whose blood was that of the Mixtecs, a nation which from the time it appeared in history had been battling the Zapotecs for possession of the mountains and valleys of Oaxaca.

Napoleon finally found his puppet: a Hapsburg archduke who, with his adoring and ambitious young Belgian wife, was mooning away his best years at Miramar on the Adriatic. Promised an annual income of 1,700,000 pesos (to be paid out of the Mexican treasury) Maximilian, with his "smooth and noble brow like a blank page unmarred by sorrow," agreed to become emperor of Mexico.

While preparing for his departure, Maximilian received a letter from St Thomas in the West Indies, which closed: "May Your Most Illustrious Highness recognize in the dean of the Mexican army a supporter and disinterested friend, and your most obedient servant who wishes you the greatest happiness and who attentively kisses the illustrious hands of Your Most Illustrious Highness. Antonio López de Santa Anna."

Santa Anna? Maximilian turned to his Mexican sycophants.

They laughed. That broken-down old war horse. Seventy and in his dotage. Hasn't sense enough to know when he is finished. Pay no attention to him. . . .

Santa Anna landed at Vera Cruz, shaking with dysentery and excitement. Maximilian and Carlota would have to pass by his estates on their way to Mexico City. He would be on hand to entertain them, to show them the roses of Jalapa in the springtime. They would insist that he accompany them to court. He would ride once more into the City of Palaces, decorated, cheered, the hero of Vera Cruz.

Few people were interested enough to laugh when General Bazaine, a heavy-handed Pedro de Alvarado in Mexico City, ordered the "Immortal Three Fourths" to be shipped back into exile.

Up in Illinois the captured leg was being handled as a curiosity, like a dinosaur's bone. Wits were busy. James Russell Lowell wrote:

"Hey, it's a perfect sin

To think wut Mexico hez paid for Santy Annys pin."

## CHAPTER XIV

# The Yellow Beard of Maximilian

THE FIRST TIME I entered Querétaro on the train from Laredo I asked the Mexican who had been showing me how to eat pomegranates if he could point out the hill where the Emperor Maximilian was shot.

He frowned very slightly as he indicated the rocky eminence on the western outskirts of the city on whose side Hapsburg Austria erected a brown-stone chapel in 1901. He set me right as carefully and politely as he had told me that by puncturing and sucking a *granada* I might avoid messing myself up with its seeds and juice. "The Hill of the Bells," he said, "where the three *Ms*—Maximilian, Miramón, Mejía—were executed for bearing arms against the republic of Mexico."

Maximiliano. Thus only is the Hapsburg archduke referred to in Mexico. One of the indictments against him was that he had demanded "the considerations due a legal monarch, when in the eyes of the republic he never possessed such rank." I have never heard him spoken of with invective. Nor with pity, although an old gentleman who lectured me on the history of Querétaro did express regret that both the execution and the embalming of the body were so badly botched. I judged that he considered this a reflection on the city's *savoir-faire*.

And Carlota? Mostly silence now. A little constraint some-



times when tourists commit the *faux pas* of wanting to hear the Cuban song, "La Paloma," which was her favorite. Not that the *habanera*, for all its associations, is looked upon with disfavor, as was the case when a scurrilous parody sprang into popularity at Carlota's departure for Europe. But the fate which befell her there gained for her the pity which was never accorded her Maxl.

The figures of Maximilian and Carlota are growing a little hazy, however, retiring into the background with the be-wigged Spanish viceroys. A few years ago I attended the *première* of the Mexican film, *La Paloma*, based on the residence of the pair in Chapultepec Castle. The audience reacted

no differently, so far as I could detect, from the one which had sat through *The Prisoner of Zenda*. "¡Qué bonito!" everybody went out exclaiming in both instances. "How pretty!"

Across from that theater on the wide Avenida Juárez stands the white marble monument to Benito Juárez, *El Benemérito*, "The Well Deserving." I have seen Indians in from the mountains, bewildered by the bustle of the metropolis, stop there as if in a safety zone, look up at the solidly seated figure and remove their sombreros. When they walked away it seemed to me that their steps were surer. Benito was "one of theirs."

Maximilian is a splendid character for a play or a historical novel, as demonstrated by Franz Werfel in his *Juárez and Maximilian* and by the Mexican romanticist, Juan A. Mateos, in the galloping *El Cerro de las Campanas*. Really his part in Mexican history was of no great importance.

The Hapsburg had been shown the result of a fake plebiscite and honestly believed that a majority of Mexicans wanted him. It was therefore a surprise to land in the still heat of Vera Cruz and find only *xopilotes* gathered on the roof tops. It was a shock to hear an interpreter in the party translate a message of defiance and reproach from Benito Juárez, president of Mexico.

History would judge between them, said Juárez. The best that history can do for Maximilian is to give him credit for good intentions. He had never understood that he was to be Napoleon's marionette! He had ideas of his own and these, to the consternation of the conservatives, were comparatively liberal. Catholic though he was, he locked horns with the clergy at once. "We are trying to make this a Catholic nation, for it never has been converted to Christian beliefs as we know them," Carlota wrote to her brother. Maximilian came out with this rebuke: "Admit, my worthy bishops, that the Mexican church has with a lamentable fatality mixed up in politics and in matters of earthly wealth, forgetting thereby and neglecting the true maxims of the Gospel. Yes, the Mexicans are a pious and a good people, but they are not Catholics in the true

sense of the word of God, and certainly the fault is not theirs." Maximilian was willing that Church and State be reunited but he refused to annul the Reform Laws in their entirety and to restore the nationalized real estate, and he insisted on tolerance for all forms of worship.

"His Holiness could scarcely suppose that the imperial government would propose and consummate the work begun by Juárez," the papal nuncio told him, and pointed out that it was the clergy which made the empire.

A French army and the Mexican hierarchy *were* the props of Maximilian's throne. The latter set in "with incredible venom, malice and underhandedness" to destroy him. Even Juárez had not suffered much worse vilification. The French grew steadily more overbearing. They wanted the province of Sonora, which had been promised them by a member of the regency that had been formed after Bazaine's occupation of Mexico City. Maximilian refused to ratify the agreement, then thought it wise to make Bazaine, now a marshal of France, a peace offering on the occasion of his marriage to a Mexican lady. The wedding gift was the Manuel Tolsa Palace by Alvarado's Leap which now houses the National Lottery.

Most fatal of the concessions made to the mustached commander of France's Foreign Legion was the "Black Decree," giving military authorities arbitrary power over the lives of Mexican citizens. Unless Maximilian's hearing was defective he cannot have been unaware of what followed. Bazaine kept his firing squads too busy. And cathedral bells could not drown out the cries of indignation. Mexicans with no particular love for the liberal, now the patriot cause, slipped away to join Juárez or to keep rendezvous in the mountains. Bands like those of Evaristo became guerrillas, *chinacos*, and found what sport it was to lasso Frenchmen. Although their patriotism may not always have been of the purest they did the republic an inestimable service.

From St Thomas came a proclamation: "LIBERALS AND CONSERVATIVES! Let us forget our fratricidal contests and go for-



ward! Let us unite against the common enemy. One single flag covers us, the flag of liberty; one single thought animates us, that of war to the death against the invaders who destroy our towns and kill our brothers. Eternal hatred to the tyrants of our native land!"

Few read it through. Wasn't Santa Anna dead yet!

Juárez and a pair of mules named Canary and Venus kept the republic as an institution out of the hands of the French. All over the northern deserts his carriage raced, coated with alkaline dust until it was almost indistinguishable amid the cacti. He even crossed the terrible Bolsón de Mapimí, between habitable Coahuila and habitable Chihuahua, to El Paso del Norte, a town whose loyalty was rewarded by the name of Ciudad Juárez. He entered El Paso, Texas, and with a shrewd sense of the value of publicity let the world know how false was the assertion in Maximilian's manifesto that "all honest men had rallied to the imperial cause."

Maximilian and Carlota meanwhile were trying to make their own escape—from reality. Chapultepec was to become a Mexican Miramar. The castle was renovated and decorated in Tuscan style, its grounds terraced and gardens planted. A wide boulevard, El Paseo de la Reforma, was built and flanked by eucalyptus trees from the hill to the statue of Charles IV, two miles away, where it joins Bucareli, which it displaced as the fashionable promenade, and the avenue, now Juárez, which leads to the National Palace. In a flurry of happiness the lovers ordered from Europe the stuff that has made many an American housewife dissatisfied with her lot: empire furniture, Persian carpets, satin brocades and Gobelin tapestries, silver epergnes and candelabra, gilt and cut-glass chandeliers, marble statues, alabaster vases and Sèvres porcelain. . . .

When Maximilian got around to consulting his Hungarian treasurer he learned that he had all but exhausted his funds. Furthermore, his and Carlota's salaries had not been forthcoming. The Mexican treasury? It was the consensus of opinion that the Mexican treasury was nonexistent.

But Carlota often felt the need of relief from the altitude of Mexico City, so her husband managed to provide her with *buenos retiros* in lower warmer regions. He was not always so fortunate as at Orizaba, "Joyful Waters," where, he informed his brother, Franz Joseph, "the enthusiastic inhabitants have decided on their own initiative to build a villa for us in one of the fairest settings of this paradise." At Acapatzingo, near Cuernavaca, he had to buy the tract of land on which he put a Pompeian house and a swimming pool for Carlota. He bought the Borda gardens and added his favorite jasmines, El Gran Duque, to Don Manuel's mangoes and to the Brazilian vine with sprays of magenta-red or purple blossoms whose introduction into Europe is credited to the French navigator, Bougainville.

One of Mexico's silliest beliefs is that birds are silent in those gardens. I hope someday to be able to give the lie to that superstition. Every time I have been there it has happened to be molting season—if it's molting that silences birds.

*Of course* birds sing in the gardens where Carlota played among the water lilies while the Union cause triumphed north of the Río Grande; while Secretary of State Seward wanted to know of a slippery Napoleon what the French Tricolor was doing in Mexico; while Bazaine received orders to bring his legions home *tout de suite*; while Juárez, student of history, wrote: "I know that the rich and powerful are not moved by the misfortunes of the poor. Much less do they try to remedy them. We shall continue our defense as if we were sufficient unto ourselves."

It must have been on one of her last visits to this southern playground that Carlota entered the Cacahuamilpa caves and by leaving an inscription on the wall, schoolgirl-fashion, gave Juárez' liberal successor an opportunity to exercise his wits on a riposte which is still legible.

"María Carlota reached this point."

"Sebastián Lerdo de Tejada went beyond."

In July 1866 Carlota sailed for Europe, to seek help from kings and statesmen who were either cursing themselves for having burned their fingers on the Mexican venture or congratulating themselves that they had not.

*"Adiós, mamá Carlota,  
Adiós, mi tierno amor,"*

sang the *chinacos*, tightening their saddle girths for some hard riding.

*Good-by, Mamma Carlota,  
Good-by to our tender love.  
Though we sing our victory,  
Attached to your memory  
May there never rancor be.*

Santa Anna was in New York that summer, befuddled. In St Thomas he had received a letter signed "W. H. Seward, Secretary of State of the United States of America," notifying him that thirty million dollars were being put on deposit for him in New York, for use in driving Maximilian from Mexico. On the strength of this communication Santa Anna had advanced large sums to an agent of his and had authorized the fellow to sign his name to numerous notes. Now the notes were coming due, his landlady was suing him for his board bill, the bank knew nothing about such an account and Secretary Seward was ignoring him. What was wrong? The agent had written the letter himself, forged Seward's name and fleeced the old man finely.

In October word came to Maximilian that Carlota was seriously ill—mad, he knew, although the cable spared him the particulars. She had gone screaming out of the world of reality while she was in the Vatican, facing the Pope over his breakfast tray. It had been impossible to eject her from the premises and she had spent the night there—"breaking the etiquette of the papal court," a Mexican historian has put it delicately.

That cable forced Maximilian to cancel an engagement with a young aide-de-camp of his, a German prince named

Felix Salm-Salm, who was to have brought his wife to Chapultepec for presentation.

*" . . . the way in which the comic and the tragic are always overlapping . . . "*

Circus-goers in the United States had known Princess Salm-Salm as a bareback rider of some heft who was billed as Agnes Leclercq. She had turned up in Washington during the darkest days of the Civil War and pestered President Lincoln for permission to go to the front. It would be so romantic! In her chasing about she met and married this German soldier of fortune, then a colonel in the Union army. A princess! How romantic! At loose ends after Appomattox, Salm-Salm fared southward to offer his sword to Maximilian. The princess went with him, hugging Jimmy, her short-haired terrier. In these days her kind collect autographs of male movie stars. In the eighteen-sixties newspaper pictures of a handsome young emperor with a virile beard, soulful eyes and a noble brow put an ache in less susceptible hearts than Agnes'. When Maximilian had hired the German sword she tagged everywhere after them, waiting for her Felix, who seems to have been somewhat of a hero-worshiper himself, to bring her to his master's notice. All she wanted was to breathe the air that Maximilian did, to look into his eyes and tell him . . .

Salm-Salm finally arranged a meeting, only to have it called off at the last moment. Then Maximilian went to Querétaro, to face the steadily advancing republicans. He gave orders that no Europeans were to sacrifice their lives by accompanying him, but resourceful Agnes cowed her husband in a sarape and sent him along. They must save their emperor from these horrid Indians.

Porfirio Díaz captured Puebla and invested Mexico City. He ordered his men to shoot anyone who came out of the capital on the pretext of negotiating, but neither his men nor his officers nor he himself had ever had experience with the like of Princess Salm-Salm. To the confusion of discipline she dashed back and forth through the lines, distributing money,

clutching officers by their brass buttons, talking of armistices and treaties and Maximilian's danger. Díaz shunted her on to Mariano Escobedo, in command of the forces besieging Querétaro. "He was too petulant to give me an escort," she told posterity.

Querétaro had fallen by the time she reached there. While General Escobedo did not comply with her request that Maximilian and Salm-Salm be released, he gave her permission to visit their cells in an old Carmelite convent. Maximilian was wane from dysentery at Agnes' great moment, but he kissed her hand and murmured something. She looked into his eyes and told him . . .

For what she told him—while he stood there wondering if Carlota were alive or mercifully dead, wondering if he would have strength enough to die with dignity with that loose screw in his bowels—I must refer the reader whose fancy the princess has captured to her memoirs, composed after her husband, let off with a light sentence at San Juan de Ulúa, had returned to Germany and lost his life in the war of 1870. The ladies of Querétaro, sisters to her under the skin, were seeing to it that Maximilian was well cared for, although the gifts that came from their needles consisted mostly of pretty underwear. La Salm-Salm inspected his bed and in great distress hurried out to buy linen worthy of touching the Hapsburg epidermis.

When it was discovered that she had been using her wiles on the guard, the prisoners were removed to another convent, the Capuchin, their guard changed and doubled. Maximilian, not knowing the reason, struck a pose. "The people below tremble, because the lion is restless in his cage."

One of the republican generals, Vicente Riva Palacio, wrote a novel about these times, *Calvario y Tabor*. Evidently he wanted to forget about Princess Salm-Salm and so did not make use therein of his experience with her. She got him cornered in a bedroom one night. "Men desire me!" she cried in the accents of a tragedy queen as she began shedding her

clothes. "Take me and save Maximilian." The general walked out. The next morning a guard appeared, armed to the teeth, to conduct her to the nearest port and put her on a vessel, any vessel, bound away from Mexico. At the first stop she filled her escort with pulque and climbed into a diligence on its way to San Luis Potosí, where Juárez had his headquarters.

While she was on the road Maximilian and his generals, Miramón and Mejía, were tried by a court-martial in the Teatro Principal of Querétaro and condemned to death.

The princess, "all tears and perfume," sank to the floor before Juárez, clasped his knees and told him that she would not rise until he had pardoned Maximilian.

"Señora," came the low even voice, "it grieves me to see you on your knees; but if all the kings and all the queens on this earth were in your place I could not spare his life. It is not I who take it away; it is the people and the law; and if I did not do their will then the people would take his life and my own as well."

Juárez was preparing a manifesto:

"Maximilian of Hapsburg knew our country merely by its geography. We were indebted to this foreigner for neither good nor evil. Only history reminded us that the representative of his ancestor, Charles V, burned my progenitor, Cuauhtemoc, making his love of country a crime . . . Today all Europe is on its knees before Caesar, whatever sacred rights of mankind he may violate; but when the first magistrate of an American republic punishes a foreign prince for an attempt against the national life of an entire people he is anathematized in Europe by the royal or imperial house from which the culprit sprang . . . It was time that Mexico demonstrated that her social justice applies to all men equally . . ."

Europe has had so many Caesars. The one that Juárez had in mind was the czar of Russia, who had been crushing the nationalistic movement in Poland.

First, however, the nation had a proclamation addressed to it from San Juan de Ulúa. Santa Anna, the hero of Vera Cruz,

was back! As he gazed at the soil where he had "planted the tree of liberty" and later had "watered that tree" with his blood . . .

But the ship which had brought the septuagenarian from New York sailed with him aboard, put there by the commanders of two war vessels, United States and British. When the ship touched at Sisal, Yucatán, Santa Anna was arrested by Mexican military authorities.

On the morning of June 16, 1867, Maximilian, Miramón and the Otomí Tomás Mejía were led into the sunshine.

"What a fine day!" exclaimed Maximilian. "I could not have picked a better one on which to die."

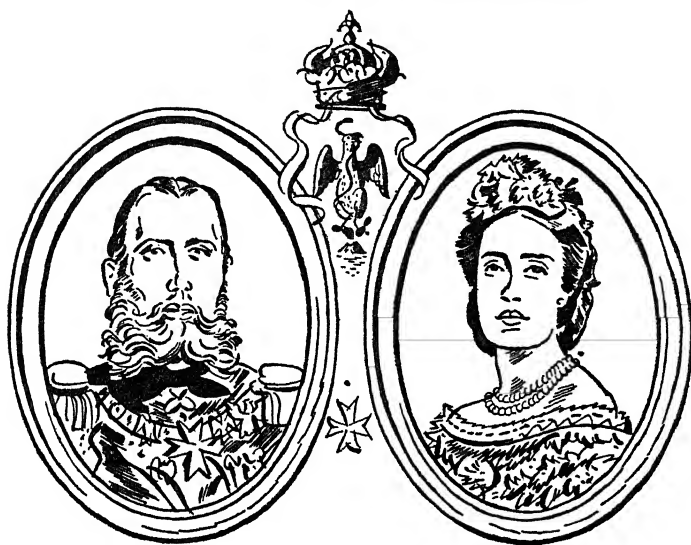
A bugle.

Maximilian looked at the Indian. "Is that the signal for the execution, Tomás?"

"I cannot say, señor; this is the first time I have ever been executed."

Maximilian smiled.

That was going to his death in approved Mexican fashion, but Maximilian was a fastidious man and he gave a thought to the manner of his returning to his family in Europe. So his last request, backed up by a distribution of gold coins, was that the firing squad not aim at his head. He received four wounds in the left breast, one in the right. But ironically, it is said, his words made one soldier nervous: the soldier who fired first and sent a bullet into his face. Not into the lower part of the face at that, where the coarse lower lip of the Hapsburgs and a weak chin which was Maximilian's own were masked by the golden beard, but into the most admired of his features, his forehead. The coffin in which he was carried back to the Capuchin convent had been built for a man of Mexican height, and Maximilian was six feet two. Nowhere in Querétaro were any blue glass eyes to be found. The morticians had to extract a pair of black ones from a Virgin in the cathedral. They lacked other requisites, and before long the body began to darken. . . .



It took death, my Querétaro informant suggested nicely, to Mexicanize Maximilian.

One night Juárez emerged on the street from a private visit to the church of San Andrés in Mexico City, where Maximilian's body had been placed after the second embalming.

"Yes," he said to a friend, "the man was tall, but not well built. His legs are too long. And if that forehead of his looked spacious it was because of baldness, not intellect."

That fall Santa Anna was tried before a military tribunal on the charge of complicity with the imperialists. The trial attracted little attention and the court merely decreed continued exile for the defendant. He was seventy-three now and couldn't last much longer anyway.

It wasn't on the cards that Juárez should go first. But he did. In 1871 he was addressing congress:

"The militarism of other days again raises its hateful standard. Its purpose is to destroy the work consolidated in fourteen



years of immense sacrifice and to cast us back into the days when a revolution signified only a change of personnel in power, leaving the way always open to another aspirant. Its promises are as alluring as those of every leader of sedition. For added mockery it invokes the constitution . . ."

Although the constitution did not at that time forbid another presidential term Porfirio Díaz had found in the reelection of Juárez a pretext for heading a *cuartelazo* or barrack revolt. His banner, he said, was "the constitution of 1857 and electoral liberty"; his program, "less government and more liberties." He failed.

In July of the next year Juárez, stricken by a heart attack, called for an Indian hand to be pressed upon the fatal side of his chest. A Zapotec hand from the far Sierra de Ixtlán. Day after day, while his body lay in state, Indians, *mestizos* and whites filed through the National Palace. Thousands followed his coffin to the San Fernando cemetery. The nation went into mourning.

Chief Justice Lerdo de Tejada qualified as president and a few months later was regularly elected to office. His fellow *Jalapeño*, Santa Anna, was permitted to return from Nassau, where he had been writing his memoirs: "Short, very short is the life of man, imperfect his works, insufficient his ability, insatiable his desires, lively his hopes, sure his suffering . . ."

The octogenarian shook with cold as his train rose from Vera Cruz to the plateau. He asked for a military greatcoat. When someone in his party offered him a woolen shawl he rejected it as unbecoming to his dignity.

As the train pulled into the Buena Vista station in Mexico City Santa Anna rose, straightened his back and peered out at the platform. No official welcoming committee? No band? There must have been a mix-up about the hour of his arrival. Here were only members of his family, a few of his old adherents and a small knot of mildly curious loafers. Two or three newspapermen were on hand, but their editors merely

wanted to report the bare fact of the return. Santa Anna no longer had any news value.

The peg leg was worn and splintered and its owner had to be assisted in and out of the coach which took him to what is now Bolívar 14, in the heart of the business district. On the sunny side of the patio there Santa Anna sat for more than two years and three months, doddering, almost blind—most excruciating of agonies, pitied when he was noticed at all. A church paper called attention to his distress and advocated a pension for him. This would probably have been granted had not Santa Anna announced that he would be satisfied with nothing less than return of the vast estates which he had lost by confiscation. A doctor told him that he could restore his eyesight by removing a cataract. "If, being blind, I suffered so many ingratitude on returning to my homeland—what would I see if you again returned my sight?" was the reply. "No, I do not wish to see; leave me sunk in darkness, I am more tranquil thus."

One day "an old man of the people" is said to have come to the house, carrying a box, and insisted on seeing Santa Anna. He was speechless at first, when led into the presence of an invalid whose waistcoat was spotted by the drippings of food. Then he identified himself as a soldier who had fought under Santa Anna at Tampico and Vera Cruz. When the monument to the Leg was torn down in 1855 he had mingled with the mob until it dispersed, then rescued the bones. He and his wife had preserved them as a sacred trust until her death. Now he had come to carry out her wish and deliver the remains to the hero of Vera Cruz. Santa Anna, in tears, responded that he no longer had military honors or gold to bestow in appreciation of such loyalty. "But I do for you that which is done for a good son," he said, embracing the old man and kissing him on the forehead.

If this story is true the Leg must lie with the rest of Santa Anna's bones in the cemetery of Guadalupe. No government officials were in the cortege of twenty carriages that moved

between the black poplars and white of the old causeway on a June morning in 1876. An elderly general spoke at the grave side. Newspapers carried accounts of the oration, a few editorials:

“General Santa Anna—The last hours of his life inspire the saddest of reflections: the man who controlled millions, who acquired fortune and honors, who exercised an unrestricted dictatorship, has died in the midst of the greatest want, abandoned by all except a few of his friends who remembered him in adversity. A relic of another epoch, our generation remembered him for the misfortunes he brought upon the republic, forgetting the really eminent services he rendered to the nation.”

One of the legs is preserved in a glass case in the Museo Michoacano of Morelia. The baseball bat of the Illinois regiment was on exhibit in Memorial Hall at Springfield until protests by Mexican visitors caused it to be relegated to a storeroom. According to a dispatch of 1938, no trace of it can be found.

There is no memorial tablet at Bolívar 14, but the old Santa Anna house can be easily located. A radio shop occupies the lower floor front of the two-story building. One can hear the loud-speaker far down the street.

## CHAPTER XV

# Stepmother of Mexicans

IN NOVEMBER 1876 President Lerdo de Tejada, who had filled out the term of Juárez and who had been duly elected for another four years, fled from Mexico City—to Acapulco and the United States—and Porfirio Díaz marched in. "Let no citizen impose himself and perpetuate himself in power, and this will be the last revolution," he had declared in the Plan of Tuxtepec.

In May 1911 Díaz submitted his resignation to congress and took the train for Vera Cruz, Paris-bound, with cries of "Viva Francisco Madero!" ringing in his ears.

For thirty-five years he had been dictator: in one term, out one, while his henchman, General Manuel González, set a new record for corruption; in one term; re-elected, "so that Mexican and foreign businessmen may continue to enjoy the guaranties which enable them to increase their respective capitals"; then for the rest of the time president by "indefinite re-election."

Since 1911 the "good old days of Don Porfirio" have been the talk of Mexico City's American Colony, of businessmen in the United States, of those Mexicans whom tourists probably have in mind when they speak of "high-class Mexicans"—in short, of those who benefited by the Díaz regime or would

stand to benefit by one like it. In these days of expropriation this palaver grows louder.

Their Don Porfirio did bring peace and order to Mexico, so, in contrast to the era which preceded and to the one which followed, his *Pax Romana* appears as a solid rock with back and foreground of stormy seas. His very name means "porphyry." But the price of that rock's safety was subservience to his will. What opposition, real or potential, Díaz sniffed at first, he won over by the granting of privileges, concessions and monopolies—or swept away by exile and assassination. "*Pan o palo*," he called this policy. "Bread or the club." To the army went most of the sinecures as governors and political bosses, *jefes políticos*. It was their job to handle the election of "sympathetic" congressmen, legislators and local officials. Under the constitution the judiciary was named by the chamber of deputies. It continued to name the judges—as fast as Díaz nominated them. Therefore, when newspapers began to cause trouble congress altered the constitutional provision of jury trial for press offenses and transferred them to the judiciary. In cases where fines and imprisonment failed to intimidate, wreckage of plants and murder were resorted to. During most of those thirty-five years the only press in Mexico was a subsidized one.

The principal inspiration for its eulogies of the dictator came from a noisy little clique of pseudo intellectuals known as *Los Científicos*. Aside from itching palms, the worst ailment of the "Scientists," according to my diagnosis, was an inferiority complex. They looked to Europe, particularly to France, as the fountainhead of all "culture" worthy of the name. They read Auguste Comte and announced that they were Positivists. They dipped into Herbert Spencer, John Stuart Mill, Nietzsche, and excitedly brought out bits of doctrine to re-enforce their conglomerate new credo of a Great Being, the state, of which they were the vital cells. Thanks to their dynamism, the state would march forward in civilization's vanguard, shaking off and trampling underfoot the parasitical

weak and unfit. A New Dawn was breaking, etc., etc. . . .

Much of this patter was meaningless, but under the leadership of José Ives Limantour, illegitimate son of a French adventuress, the *Científicos* got into power in 1893 and demonstrated how really dangerous a little learning can be.

We are still being confronted by their statistics, proving what material progress was made during the Díaz regime. Granting that the national income did rise from 19,776,638 pesos to nearly one hundred million, and that Díaz did deserve much of the praise which they gave him, some of their figures are open to rebuttal.

The discovery and introduction into Mexico of the cyanide process of extracting gold and silver did more than Díaz' policies to boost production of these metals from twenty-five million pesos to one hundred and sixty million.

Imports were octupled, exports quintupled. But with plenty of raw materials, capital and cheap labor available, raw materials continued to be practically the only exports from a nation which made industrialization one of its watchwords.

Although miles of railway increased from four hundred to fifteen thousand, Limantour himself admitted that the lines "followed no plan, formed no system and, instead of being projected for development of the country, had been the product of private interest and accident. In consequence, while vast regions were railroadless, others had two and even three lines uselessly paralleling each other."

We have been told over and over that Díaz' Mexico could borrow all the money it wanted at a little more than four per cent. The dictator's consistent discrimination against his countrymen—those outside the charmed circle, that is—gave rise to the saying that Mexico had become "the mother of foreigners and the stepmother of Mexicans."

Díaz received financial backing from the clergy in return for a promise to modify the Reform Laws, which Lerdo de Tejada had been enforcing. There is ample reason to believe the assertion of Luis Lara Pardo with regard to the revolt of

1876: "Undoubtedly General Díaz received military elements from the United States . . . Certainly he secured moral support and very probably he received the direct aid of American interests, offering in exchange full-handed concessions." Lerdo de Tejada, fearing foreign capital and wanting to keep a desert between Mexico and the United States, had refused to grant railway concessions.

"The *Científicos* talked science and Positivism; their real program was scientific stealing," writes Carleton Beals in his biography of Díaz. "Close advisers to the various ministries, they drew up new laws, revised old codes: the Commerce Law, the Banking Law, the Railway code, the Monetary Law—all with a positivist criterion, which meant that the old Roman-Spanish-Aztec legal bases were substituted by Roman-Napoleonic-Anglo-Saxon tendencies, more adopted to laissez-faire doctrines of capitalistic development and private property tenure.

"This in itself was a daring revolution, and perhaps the most remarkable revolution, the only real revolution, Mexico has had since the Spanish Conquest. Revolution in Mexico has rarely been the property of those who have shouted 'revolution' and provoked armed disturbances; Díaz was a great 'revolutionary' figure, alongside of whom Obregón and Calles were *papier-mâché*. Whether the Díaz revolution was wise is another story, for these laws which overthrew basic legal structure were meant to facilitate land-grabbing, mine-grabbing, oil-grabbing, and a new conquest of Mexico by Europe—this time by Northern Europe and the United States."

Of course the Mexico of the constitution of 1917 will not concede the validity of those acts of the dictator and his *Científicos*.

The principle that everything under the sod belongs to the nation was affirmed by King Charles III of Spain in 1783, when he ordered: "The mines are the property of my royal crown," including "all bitumens and earth juices." It was written into the constitutions of 1824 and 1857. But by the mining

codes of 1884, 1892 and 1910, Díaz declared that title to the subsoil adhered to the holder of the surface.

In 1900 Edward L. Doheny acquired extensive oil fields about Tampico at a price of a little more than a dollar an acre and inaugurated the wildcat period by shooting the first well at Ébano on May 14, 1901. The Rockefeller interests came in, and the British firm of Pearson and Son, headed by Lord Cowdray. Except for a negligible stamp duty, these foreigners paid no taxes and could export freely the "black gold" that flowed from many wells, under its own pressure, at the rate of as high as fifty thousand barrels a day.

Earlier in the Díaz period foreign investments had gone principally into mines and haciendas, awakening *Científicos* and others to the possibilities of trafficking in land, not for the historic purpose of exploitation, but merely for that of speculation.

Under the Spanish viceroys there had been no demand among *encomenderos* and later concessionaires for extensive tracts in the northern deserts and in coastal and southern *tierra caliente*. Ownership of these *terrenos baldíos*, "idle lands," had passed directly from the Spanish crown to the nation at independence. Most of them remained unsurveyed and undefined when the eighteen-eighties brought railway construction and a focusing of attention upon all manner of neglected natural resources. Yucatán came into prominence with the discovery that the lowly henequen plant was capable of yielding "green gold" in the form of sisal binder twine. Progress demanding that the *baldíos* be turned over to private initiative, development companies were authorized by law to survey them and to keep in return one third of the land surveyed. The "colonization" law of 1894 did away with acre limitation and the obligation to improve the properties granted.

By dealing out concessions as in the days when the *encomienda* system was being implanted Díaz was able to attach to himself by the bonds of interest a powerful and concen-



trated group of landed gentry, whose thoughts soon turned to the boulevards of Paris and the green cloth of Monte Carlo. In Chihuahua thirty-five million acres went to seven individuals. One concern obtained 12,500,000 acres in Coahuila, Nuevo León, Tamaulipas and Chihuahua. Two men had a bite of five million acres out of Durango.

Seventeen persons or families received approximately one fifth of Mexico's total area. In payment less than eight million pesos entered the national treasury.

Nor can Díaz be accused of lining his own pockets to any great extent. As has been the case with many a dictator, his lust of power precluded any other. In the land he saw a means both of consolidating that power and of hastening the "development" of Mexico.

Had the *terrenos baldíos* actually been untilled, unoccupied, something might be said for this wholesale disposal of them. But included were countless Indian villages with what communal lands they had been able to defend or regain in the course of centuries. The Spanish crown had afforded the pueblos some protection against the *encomenderos*. The *hacendados* had the full support and encouragement of the central government and the use of its punitive agencies: judges, *jefes políticos* and the *Rurales*, a mounted constabulary organized by Díaz to checkmate the army and to rid the country of bandits by putting them in uniform—a jaunty gray uniform with braid and silver buttons, red tie and cummerbund and broad felt hat.

Díaz put a new intensity into the old attack on the villages. He was resolved to eradicate Indianism and Indian property concepts, and the first step was to finish the job of breaking up the *ejidos*.

The *Científicos*, many of whom had as much Indian blood as Díaz, read Gobineau and filled their heads with what revolutionary Mexico refers to as "that arrogant doctrine of the superiority of the white race."

In 1898 the novelist, Federico Gamboa, summed up the offi-

cial attitude toward the Indian when he told an approving audience in the National Preparatory School: "The indigenous civilizations destroyed by the Spaniards are as far from us as the splendors of ancient Egypt." All Mexican culture, he said, was Spanish, without "Indian vestiges or habits." True, one saw "many degenerates still, a poverty-stricken herd . . . lamentable and of a race . . . naked of intelligence, its blood exhausted, agonizing in silence without leaving anything, not even heirs to weep its demise." Nearly all the great men of the republic had been whites or *mestizos*. Benito Juárez and the Aztecs Ignacio Altamirano and Ignacio Ramírez of the Reform had been "exceptions proving the rule." And they were Indians "only physically." The Indian of unmixed blood gave Gamboa "sorrow, at times shame." The United States, Argentina and Chile had adopted the right procedure in wiping out the Indians or driving them into the deserts. . . .

In the primarily anticlerical *Ley Lerdo* of 1856, with its prohibition of corporate landholding, Díaz had a ready-made legal weapon for use against the *ejido* villages. Andrés Molina Enríquez described the result in *Los Grandes Problemas Nacionales*, a brilliant analysis of the Díaz agrarian policy which helped to undermine the dictatorship upon its publication in 1909.

"Many times the *mestizos* initiated the procedure for the breakup of communal landholdings of Indian villages, bought up the lands, influenced the distribution of the individual titles, and immediately collected them, paying the costs in the names of the recipients. Many of the Indians were not owners of their lands for even one day. And an investigation of the purchase price would show that some pieces of land were bought for a few pieces of bread, a fourth of a peck or so of maize, a few jars of pulque or other alcoholic drink. Once the Indians passed over the titles to their individual pieces of land they had no source of firewood or wood for house posts or

walls, no charcoal to sell, no sticks upon which to make their *tortillas*, no dead wood to burn their pottery, nothing with which to feed their animals, nor any place to pasture them, no place to hunt or fish, nor the use of any fruit trees."

Much of the United States passed into the hands of the white man through this same inability of the Indian to grasp the fact that land can be alienated.

By 1910 the hacienda held eighty-one per cent of all the inhabited communities in Mexico. In Guanajuato, Zacatecas and four states backed against the Pacific—Michoacán, Jalisco, Nayarit, Sinaloa—this percentage rose to more than ninety. There the village community had virtually ceased to exist; only so many serfs remained. Over eighty per cent of the villages were within the confines of haciendas in Querétaro, Aguascalientes, San Luis Potosí, the border states of Nuevo León and Coahuila, the territory of Baja California and the southern states of Tabasco and Chiapas. The pueblos had always held out best in the mountainous regions surrounding the Valley of Mexico: in Oaxaca, Mexico, Hidalgo, Puebla, Vera Cruz, Morelos and Guerrero. Consequently those states bore the brunt of the attack by the *hacendados* under Díaz. In them the counterattack, when it came, had a more clearly defined objective than elsewhere in Mexico: the rescue of the land.

There was constant resistance to despoilment, in spite of familiarity with the penalties: death, conscription in the army or convict labor in Tabasco, Yucatán or Quintana Roo, "the most evil, swampy, pestiferous and deadly (region) of the whole country." When a pueblo in Hidalgo protested against the loss of its *ejido* the Cravioto dynasty of *hacendados* ordered the village leaders seized and buried up to their necks in the land which they were trying to save. Then a party of *Rurales* galloped over them. Local authorities chased some surveyors out of the Papantla Valley, where steaming jungles hide the Thunderbolt Pyramid. *Rurales* and federal troops

swept through the region, leaving it practically depopulated.

When the loyalty of the Indian transcends his native village to embrace a district like the Papantla a central authority bent on unifying and standardizing Mexico comes up against a well-nigh insurmountable obstacle. Díaz' experience proved once again that, unless carried to the point of annihilation, the use of force leads only to firmer cohesion in the threatened *patria chica*. The Yaquis of Sonora had been allowed to till their fields in peace for only eighty-five years during the centuries since they wiped out the first Spanish expedition that went against them, soon after the fall of Tenochtitlán. They had become a self-reliant Spartan group that Díaz failed to disrupt.

To apply the term racial minority to the Yaquis is to give them a distinction which they do not possess. They constitute a tribe. Their attitude may even be called nationalistic. They are the tallest Indians of Mexico, although the average Osage of Oklahoma stands head and shoulders above any Yaqui I ever saw. There are many barriers between the Yaquis and the rest of Mexico, but historical and geographic factors are responsible for them, not blood or language. The Yaqui tongue, spoken by the neighboring Mayos and Tehuecos as well, belongs to the Nahuatl stock, which has other representatives in the Huichol, Cora and Tarahumare of the Sierra Madre Occidental.

The broad Yaqui River, making its rich alluvial deposits between the mountains and the Gulf of California, has played the part of a Nile in Yaqui history. "God gave the river to the Yaquis, not a piece to each one," was their reply to Díaz and the encroaching land companies, who saw rice and cotton plantations established there. For over five years they held the town of Cajeme, named after their principal chief, against repeated assaults by federal forces. In 1900 Díaz grew so exasperated that he ordered a war of extermination. A bounty of a hundred pesos was placed on a pair of Yaqui ears. Contractors bought Yaquis—men, women, children—at

seventy-five pesos a head and shipped them to the henequen fields of Yucatán or the tobacco plantations of El Valle Nacional, Oaxaca's Death Valley. Some Yaquis escaped from Yucatán and made their way across Mexico, back to the defense of the *patria chica*.

The war cost the Mexican treasury fifty million pesos, and Yaqui warriors finally helped to drag the dictator down. Two Amerindian tribes are justified in boasting that they have fought every invader and have never been conquered: the Araucanians of Chile and Argentina and the Yaquis of Mexico.

Kinsmen of the Yaquis, the Tarahumares, gave an account of themselves in one of the most fantastic episodes of the period. These Indians, inhabitants of the healthful Tarahumare range of western Chihuahua, are the marathon runners of Mexico. On a diet of *pinole*—corn ground and toasted—they chase down deer and wild horses. During long years of exposure to Apache raids from the north they became celebrated for their marksmanship with bows and arrows and with Winchesters traded for along the Río Grande. In 1892 there was a flare of religious fanaticism among them. Over in Sonora a faith healer, the epileptic Maid of Caborca, was attracting pilgrims from great distances on the windy stretches of Mexico's far northwest. One of her cures was effected on a man from the Chihuahuan village of Tomochic, which had been holding tenaciously to its land. On his return he proclaimed himself a saint and preached a militant crusade. A Catholic priest who attempted to eject him from the church was himself driven out by the followers of "San José." Agents of a British mining company reported to the governor that Tomochic was in revolt. The pueblo had only three hundred inhabitants, including Indians, *mestizos* and *criollos*, but their rifles laid low a detachment of federal troops and Díaz personally directed operations against them from Mexico City. Tomochic delenda est. To his rage, after a siege of more than a week by 1500 soldiers, Tomochic still stood. It

required an assault of three days to capture and burn the place.

What followed, the massacre of the wounded, combatants and noncombatants alike, turned the stomach of a young army officer, Heriberto Frías. When he put an unvarnished account into a novel, *Tomochic*, he was reduced in rank and almost given the death sentence by a court-martial in Chihuahua.

The "official" literature of the Díaz regime is represented by the poetry of Gutiérrez Nájera and Amado Nervo, the former a precursor of the *modernismo* of the Nicaraguan Rubén Darío, the latter the greatest poet, after the master, of that movement, which consisted in the adaptation to the Spanish language of the form and substance of the French Parnassian, decadent and symbolist schools of verse. Gutiérrez Nájera and Amado Nervo, although born in Mexico City and in Tepic respectively, are analogous to the fine statue of Benito Juárez which was erected in Oaxaca at this time: a statue carved in Italy by an Italian sculptor who had never seen Juárez or set foot in Mexico. Their verse belongs to Mexico mostly by right of the Mexican melancholy which pervades it. The Santo Domingan critic, Henríquez Ureña, would ascribe this characteristic to nature rather than to the influence of the Indian:

"Just as the landscape of the high Mexican plateau, accentuated by the rarity of the air, rendered barren by the dryness and the cold, under a pale blue sky, is covered with gray and yellowish tones, so Mexican poetry seems to take its tonality from them. A moderation and a melancholy sentiment suggestive of twilight and autumn agree with that perpetual autumn of the heights very different from the ever-fertile spring of the tropics."

*Tomochic* is the rankest of realism, precursor both of the Revolution which was to shatter poets' ivory towers and of the literature of the Revolution: the works of Mariano Azuela, Rafael Muñoz, Martín Luis Guzmán, Gregorio López y

Fuentes. Most early novelists of this unruly school were influenced, consciously or unconsciously, by the narrative of Heriberto Frías. Many of them have written better novels, for as a novel *Tomochic* suffers from faulty construction and unevenness of style. Originally published in installments by a Mexico City newspaper, perhaps it had best be taken as a piece of reporting.

In this light the army officer did a crack job on at least one dispatch. Out of the chapter, "Los Perros de Tomochic," creeps the grisliness of warfare which fails to come through the description of the pit in *Salammbô*, Flaubert's labored tale of the revolt of the Carthaginian mercenaries. The reader feels the glacial cold taking possession of the Chihuahuan mountains at sunset. He sees—and sees as evil—the little tongues of fire licking at the heaped corpses of Tomochic's defenders. Then the stillness is broken as hordes of unfed porkers venture out of the canyons and go rooting toward the blood smell, to find the dogs of Tomochic guarding the remnants of their masters. Through the night, "*allá en la siniestra soledad tenebrosa de Tomochic*," animals reproduce the battle noises of men. . . .

Sensational? Apocalyptic, as Heriberto Frías tells it.

Díaz apologists would, if not condone, then deplore the fate of these *patrias chicas* as the inevitable consequence of the march of civilization. When it comes to the everyday life of the peon who made no resistance, they would point to such haciendas as that of San Gabriel, on the old Camino Real in southern Morelos, owned and humanely conducted by the Amor family. Mrs Alec Tweedie, an English lady, was entertained at San Gabriel in 1901. She described it in *Mexico as I Saw It* and Díaz put his official stamp of approval on her book.

"In all probability it was built for a monastery; it looks like the work of monks. The enormous thickness of the walls, which keep out the heat in summer and cold in winter, the

extraordinary solidity of everything, and the vast space it covers, bespeak a religious house. At the back is a fine stone swimming bath; indeed, it is well supplied not only with necessities but with luxuries. . . .

"What a place for romance, what stories might be told of love, intrigue, murder, in such a house as this. With its long corridors, numerous chambers, strange balconies, its church, shop, great yards, and outbuildings, it forms a veritable town in itself. . . .

"The four Amor brothers were educated in England, and Victor Amor . . . looked a typical specimen of an English sportsman . . . Señor Amor had a black band on his arm in recognition of England's loss of her queen. . . .

"The village, containing nearly three thousand souls, belongs to the hacienda. The people pay no rent, and the owners of the hacienda hold the right to turn them out. The peasants are lent the ground on which they build their own houses—such as they are—merely bamboo walls roofed over with a sort of thatch. They are obliged to work for the hacienda, in truly feudal style, whenever called upon to do so. Each man, as a rule, has an allotted number of days on which he is bound to render service. . . .

"There is no church in the village; that, like everything else, belongs to the hacienda. . . .

"Each hacienda is obliged to keep its shop, and there all the purchases of the village are made, the owner of the hacienda taking the profit or risk of loss. Everything is supplied the workers . . . A man and his family live on six or eight cents a day . . . and men earn fifty cents a week on an average at an hacienda; this is quite sufficient; they sit rent free, they have no fires to pay for, little clothing is required, and if so minded they can get pulque or *aguardiente* for a couple of cents.

"But alas! it allows no margin to save; not that they would save if they had it; they would only drink away the extra money, for they have not yet learnt thrift. . . .



"It was very picturesque, that large yard, with the mules and carts and peons flitting about. . . ."

To the dictator's displeasure the foreign visitors whom he made so welcome numbered many journalists who were not satisfied to look at the picturesque, to listen to bands playing in the grillwork kiosks which had appeared in the plazas of Mexican towns large and small, to admire construction work on the white marble Teatro Nacional with its Tiffany curtain of colored glass (cost \$47,000 American gold). These fellows went poking about the country on their own and returned to the United States and England to write damning accounts of what they had seen: peons working with chains on their legs, peons locked up at night in rooms so small that they had to sleep on top of one another, peons flogged for failure to kiss the hand of master or mistress every day, *hacendados*, or in their absence foremen, exercising first right over the women, recalcitrant women hung up and syringed with chile water. . . .

A report such as that of John Kenneth Turner on Yucatán and the Oaxaca Death Valley outweighs a dozen books by naïve writers whose Mexican sight-seeing was mapped out by Díaz aides.

El Valle Nacional of northern Oaxaca lies far up the muddy Papaloapam, "River of Butterflies." A "hot and sickly land," Bernal Díaz called it when he campaigned there with Sandoval. In order that Mexico might have a tobacco industry Porfirio Díaz let Spaniards despoil its inhabitants, the Chinantecos, of their fields. Mr Turner writes of watching gangs of serfs at work:

"The men were the color of the ground, and it struck me as strange that they moved incessantly while the ground was still. Here and there among the moving shapes stood others—with long, lithe canes in their hands and sometimes swords and pistols in their belts. The first farm at which we

stopped was San Juan del Río. Crouching beside the porch of the building was a sick slave. One foot was swollen to twice its natural size, and a dirty bandage was wrapped clumsily about it. 'What's the matter with your foot?' I asked. 'Blood poisoning from insect bites,' replied the slave. 'He'll have maggots in another day or two,' the boss told us.

"Just before we crossed the river we spoke to an old man with a stump of a wrist who was working alone near the fence. 'How did you lose your hand?' we asked. 'A foreman cut it off with a sword,' was the reply. During my ride through the fields and along the roads that day I often wondered why some of those bloodless, toiling creatures did not cry out to us and say, 'Help us! For God's sake help us! We are being murdered!' Then I remembered that all men who pass this way are like their own bosses, and in answer to a cry they could expect nothing better than a mocking laugh, and perhaps a blow besides."

The *Científicos* talked of capitalist efficiency. There *was* considerable of this in the production of tobacco in Oaxaca, of henequen in Yucatán, of coffee and rubber in Chiapas, of sugar in Morelos, of cattle in the north. But for its basic food supply Mexico was dependent on the central plateau. By the end of the first decade of the twentieth century *hacendados* had had absolute political and economic control there long enough to be able to show results in terms of that efficiency. There had been money for French furniture and perfumes, for English cloth and shoes; but only in a few instances had cultivation of the soil advanced beyond the oxen and wooden plow stage of the sixteenth century. Great tracts of fertile lands lay untilled, truly *terrenos baldíos*, simply because of the owners' indifference or because of the expectation of selling them sooner or later to some foreign development company at a big profit. Meanwhile the *milpas* of the peons had had to climb the mountainsides. The least that could have been expected of the hacienda was to support the popu-

lation of Mexico. Yet, low as was the standard of living of the masses, it failed to do so.

In 1908 the black sheep of a wealthy *hacendado* family of Coahuila wrote truthfully: "Despite the vast extensions of workable lands there is not produced the cotton or wheat necessary for the consumption in normal years, and in sterile years we have to import even corn and beans, the basis of the alimentation of the Mexican people."

The writer was Francisco Madero, who in that year set forth the case against absolutism in his book, *The Presidential Succession*, and called upon the eighty-year-old Díaz to fulfill the pledge which he had made in the Creelman interview, published in *Pearson's Magazine* of New York. "Brushing a curtain of scarlet trumpet flowers and vinelike pink geraniums" as he walked along a terrace of Chapultepec Castle, the dictator had told the journalist that he proposed to leave the presidency at the end of his term in 1910. When Díaz, apparently having intended his words for foreign consumption only, came out as a candidate for the nth time, Madero entered the field against him as the nominee of an anti-re-electionist party, only to be jailed at San Luis Potosí on a charge of plotting armed insurrection.

Although Madero sympathizers stoned Díaz' house on September 11, 1910, no signs of there being anything amiss in Mexico greeted the eyes of the foreigners who attended the celebration of the centenary of the *Grito de Dolores* four days later. Representatives from every nation in the world were entertained at this, Mexico's greatest party. Twenty million pesos were spent. Twenty carloads of champagne were drunk at a ball in the National Palace. Indians were driven off the streets of the capital, "that they may not offend the eyes of our guests with their ridiculous and immoral aspect."

In the long speeches about the wonderful changes that had taken place in Mexico during a century no reference was

made to the altered complexion of the country. In 1910 the races stood numerically somewhat as follows:

Whites	..... 1,150,000:	equal to 7.5 per cent of total
<i>Mestizos</i>	..... 8,000,000:	equal to 53 per cent of total
Indians	..... 6,000,000:	equal to 39 per cent of total

Comparing these figures with those of 1805, it appears that there had been little change in the number of whites, although in relation to the total population it had diminished fifty per cent. Indians had more than doubled in numbers, while keeping close to their percentage. *Mestizos* had quadrupled in numbers, while increasing their percentage *at the expense of the whites*. The latter had composed nearly one fifth of the population at the beginning of one century, less than one thirteenth at the beginning of the next, when Porfirio Díaz tried to bleach his Mixtec skin with chemicals.

Another disregarded, probably unrealized, change was the development of an industrial working class, small as yet, concentrated in a few cities, but beginning to feel its muscles. In order to obtain laborers, railroad builders and owners of mines and factories had had to pay off the debts of hacienda peons at the *tiendas de raya*, the company stores, where accounts were kept so juggled that a worker would never be able to free himself by his own efforts and where his debts passed to his children. These men now received from four to six pesos a week for a working day of from twelve to fourteen hours, whereas on the haciendas they had been lucky to have twenty-five centavos a day credited to their accounts. They came into contact with workers from other parts of Mexico and with Spanish immigrants who talked volubly of anarchism and syndicalism. Many got temporary jobs in the United States, where they became members of the I.W.W. A few Mexican intellectuals—Ricardo and Enrique Flores Magón, Antonio Villareal, Díaz Soto y Gama—had begun to preach socialism. The labor movement had had its baptism of blood in 1907, when federal troops shot down unarmed

strikers in the copper mines of Cananea in Sonora and in the textile mills of Río Blanco in Vera Cruz.

By 1910 nearly half of Mexico was held by less than three thousand families, while of the ten million Mexicans engaged in agriculture, more than nine and a half million did not own the land which they were working with their hands. Down in Morelos an Indian saw that the only remedy for this violation of Nezahualcoyotl's law was to use cane knives and rifles.

## CHAPTER XVI

### Valentina

ON THE EDGE of a ravine in Cuernavaca stands Cortés' stout palace, now altered somewhat to meet the governmental needs of the capital of Morelos. The worn staircase is the one which the conqueror trod, however, and the arcades at the rear are the theater boxes which he designed them to be: boxes that face a stage where beauty is too harmonious to be else than the setting for an operetta, yet after a time grows too insistent for that.

Across the choked *barranca* stretches the uneven floor of the valley, terminated abruptly by the mountain ramparts of Morelos, their summits lost in clouds over which hang the backdrops of the snows of Popocatepetl and Ixtaccihuatl. Palms, mango trees and masses of bougainvillea partially mask red-tiled roofs and walls of blue and rose and yellow, washed by rain and sunlight to pastel shades. The beauty spot on this landscape, heightening by contrast the charms of its make-up, is the squat structure of volcanic stone in the middle distance, where the vibration of cannon placed during the Revolution on an apparently natural mound dislodged earth from the Aztec pyramid of Teopanzalco.

Most visitors to Cortés' arcades exclaim and start adjusting cameras. The exceptional individual, the one who wastes so much time sitting on park benches, drowns as under an opiate

and misses his bus. Lanky Texans, virile at any cost and as distrustful of ecstasy as of pickpockets, stare a moment, then spit defiantly over the balustrades.

Yet one does not know Morelos unless he has watched the swift change of that scene, on a summer afternoon, to the awesome. The volcanoes' snowcaps are blacked out. Clouds roll down from The Three Marys and from the fantastic rocks where the pulque god, Tepoztecatl, has his stronghold. Lightning flashes like sparks struck by horses' hoofs from stony ground. A chill wet wind sweeps the arcades. With it comes a rumble as of a cavalry charge, sometimes a sibilant sound, oddly like a rising voice.

If you have listened to many *corridos*, you know what the storm is hiding: Zapata and his band. Zapata dead? Why,

*You can hear the jingle of his spurs,  
His terrible voice again,  
As, teeth gritted in a curse,  
He shouts out orders to his men.*

If you have been warned not to eat the first fruits of the year in Morelos it was not because they are likely to be green, but because they have been nourished with blood. Zapata's blood.

In 1930 I stood on one of those arcades and watched Diego Rivera, a dark *mestizo* in dark workman's clothes, at work on the frescoes which Ambassador Dwight W. Morrow was to present to the city of Cuernavaca. Rivera is big, as all the world knows, tremendous. The bulk of him made me listen for the cracking of the plank upon which he was hoisted. Much of his heaviness is in the satire infusing those murals—murals which, being a part of the landscape, drawing color and life from it as the sun draws moisture from the stream under the banana leaves below, have converted many a tourist from his doubts about *al fresco* painting. Satire cannot "pull its punches" when it leaves the ivory tower to elbow a way among the masses.

Here Bernal Díaz del Castillo and his mates swarm over the bridge of trees to take Cuernavaca from the rear. (The *barranca* which they crossed is the one behind the Borda gardens.) Here they rape and brand and slay. Priests stand beside the *encomenderos*, fingering jewels. Such attention did Rivera give the padres that the next time the examiner of these murals looks at a face beneath a cowl he will search there, perhaps unconsciously, for sordid sanctimoniousness.





Cortés introduced the cultivation of sugar cane to Morelos. One can see, from the palace, the mill of his hacienda of Atlacomulco. Under the Díaz regime Morelos was Mexico's sugar bowl, its richest state. Rivera has put before our eyes the price of that "progress"—peons toiling under the overseer's lash, while the *hacendado* lolls in a hammock beneath an image of the Virgin, and, in the last panel, a federal trooper dead upon the dark *morelense* soil. Over the soldier—right hand grasping the curved cane knife which can so neatly lop off heads, left hand laid on the bridle of the white horse, Relámpago—stands slender, wiry, black-mustached Zapata, in *huaraches* and white Indian clothing.

The clothes are symbolic, I suppose, for Zapata the fighter was sheathed in dull black leather, like a snake's skin, buttoned with silver and heavy with cartridge belts. His felt sombrero was huge, but the Virgin of Guadalupe clung to the band, helping it sail through the wind and protecting it from bullets.

The word *zapata* means a leather strap used as a door hinge.

Emiliano of that name was a native of Anenecuilco, a *barrio* of Villa Ayala. The village *ejido* was absorbed by the hacienda of Ignacio de la Torre y Mier, but Emiliano kept himself clear of outright peonage and became a share cropper, a *mediero*, on hacienda soil. He raised melons and, with his reputation as a horseman, was always able to get relatively well-paid work caring for livestock. He remained a "son of the pueblo," however, and when, on a visit to the De la Torre y Mier stables in Mexico City, he saw tiled floors and marble baths provided for horses his thoughts flashed to the unsanitary *jacales* in which his people were forced to live. Earth floors, lattice walls of palm without windows, thatch roofs without chimneys. He himself said later that his resolve to win back the land from the haciendas was born on that day.

There was but one way to accomplish this, Zapata thought then, and always thought. One Sunday he called the villagers together and told them to get their weapons and be prepared to defend what was rightfully theirs. Then he and his brother,

Eufemio, began to divide the old *ejido* into lots, as it used to be, one for each family. The *jefe político* of Yautepec had him arrested and sent the way of other troublemakers: into the army. Thinking him chastened by six months' service and needing him on the hacienda, De la Torre y Mier helped his family pay for a substitute. Emiliano returned with considerable knowledge of military organization and with contempt for an army which was made up largely of conscripts like himself. He was illiterate but he formed a friendship with Otilio Montaña, a schoolteacher of Cuautla, who kept him abreast of Madero's activities in the north. The little Coahuilan, released from prison on bail through family influence, had crossed into Texas and at San Antonio issued the Plan of San Luis Potosí, in which he declared the election of Porfirio Díaz null and void and called for a general insurrection on November 20, 1910.

When the Anti-Re-electionist party of Morelos put up a candidate against the Díaz nominee for governor Zapata campaigned energetically for the former, Francisco Leyva. Díaz' straw man was declared the winner, after the usual farce of balloting, and the Zapata brothers wisely skipped out to the mountains, revolutionaries. If they were Maderistas it was because of one plank in the Plan of San Luis Potosí:

"Through the abuse of the law of *terrenos baldíos* numerous small proprietors, the majority of them indigenous, have been despoiled of their lands. It being entirely just that the land of which they were despoiled so arbitrarily be returned to them, such actions are declared subject to revision, and those who acquired land in so immoral a fashion, or their heirs, will be required to restore them to their original owners, paying the latter moreover an indemnity for the damage suffered."

That plank had been inserted by Madero in good faith, but unfortunately it was a minor one.

Madero sent agents from San Antonio to organize risings

in Mexico City, Pachuca and Puebla on the twentieth. Águiles Serdán, Puebla workman and founder of an anti-re-electionist paper, went home disguised as a woman in a black dress. "I'm taking my wife her widow's weeds," he told Señora Madero. He was detected by Díaz sleuths and on the eighteenth, while Madero was leaving San Antonio for the border, Águiles Serdán was defending his house against federal troops. The next morning he became the "First Martyr of the Revolution." Madero's agents in the capital and in Pachuca were arrested. Madero himself, after having been lost for twenty-four hours in south Texas, crossed the Río Grande to find only thirty men awaiting him. He went wearily back into Texas.

Mexico had not taken up arms at his call. But, significantly, there were revolts in almost every state, each coming in its own good time and after its own fashion. Gadfly affairs, Díaz thought most of them, but the situation in Chihuahua, kingdom of the Terrazas family, had to be taken seriously. Almost every day came word of raids on towns where there were federal garrisons, of attacks on troop trains, of dynamited bridges. Pascual Orozco defeated a detachment of federals. Máximo Castillo threatened Chihuahua City, one of his fighters penetrating into the outskirts with fifteen men and retiring with three. The name of this daredevil was Doroteo Arango, but he preferred that of a famous bandit, now dead, Francisco Villa. . . .

While Madero, thinking his cause lost, went to New Orleans, so hard up that he had to darn his own socks, the mountains and jungles of the south were disgorging outlandish figures. The governor of Guerrero had himself shipped from the state in a packing case when he heard that the Figueroa brothers and Margarita Neri were at hand. One cannot blame him for wanting to keep out of La Neri's clutches. Supposedly a Dutch-Maya *mestiza* of Quintana Roo, she appeared in Mexico City as Acapara Tompa, created

a sensation with her Maya dances, became the mistress of a member of Díaz' cabinet and helped considerably to make the capital the Little Paris it called itself. The next page in the lady's history is a blank, so far as I am concerned, but 1910 found her a barbaric Joan of Arc, leading a thousand men up through Tabasco and Chiapas and vowing to decapitate Díaz with her own hands. Upon being told that she had reached the neighborhood of the Río Balsas, where the hot lands breed a disgusting disease which has no name except "the discolor," Don Porfirio growled: "Guerrero, that's the state in which a woman like her started the *pinto* by cohabiting with a crocodile."

Zapata sent two men to Margarita, suggesting that she join his band. They returned with their ears dangling from leather thongs hung about their necks.

Nothing like a complete history of this first phase of the Revolution will ever be written. It would have to contain an account of each of countless independent little groups like these. It would require particular study of the leader of each, for in most cases the leader made the group, not vice versa. If he eventually received a commission from Madero it was in recognition of a *fait accompli* and signified little. If he were successful in his first encounters—with federals or with parties from other localities—he drew men to him, acquired horses, arms and ammunition. In the event of his defeat or death his band split, some to join other bands, some to return home with their loot. Only a strong personality could survive defeat. In extraordinary cases the prestige of a leader grew until he was spoken of as colonel or general. Temporary alliances might be made among several of these chieftains and a formidable army result. Thus Pancho Villa, after entering Mexico with four men, became commander of forty thousand.

Intellectuals played a negligible part in all this. The Mexican Revolution was the work of no Rousseau, Voltaire,

Montesquieu, Diderot. "The revolution is the hurricane, and the man who gives himself to it is no longer a man; he is a miserable withered leaf whipped by the wind," a character in Mariano Azuela's *Los de Abajo* remarks cynically. Azuela, born in 1879 in the little town of Lagos de Moreno in Jalisco, put his experiences as doctor to a guerrilla band into this terse masterpiece, which was published in El Paso while he was an exile there and which remained unrecognized for almost a decade. A first reading of *The Underdogs* is like a look at a kaleidoscope flashing through sunlight with such swift change of facet that one is dazzled and sees only blackness—black brutality that goes to the pit of the stomach. There is the story of the Revolution's beginnings. It is in the paintings of Francisco Goitia, a Zacatecan who returned from study in Europe and obtained the position of artist on the staff of the Villista general, Felipe Ángeles. It is the caricatures of Guadalupe Posada, observer of two epochs. It is in anonymous ballads.

The measure of a man in Mexico is balladry. *Corridos* are sung, to the accompaniment of a guitar, when men gather about campfires on the northern ranges. They are sung on street corners, in markets and *pulquerías*. The doggerel verses, printed on green or pink paper and usually illustrated with woodcuts, are hawked among the audience at each intermission. *Corridos* take the place of newspapers, movies, radio, since they furnish news, fiction, gossip, drama, history, jokes, political speeches. Murder, robbery, executions, *cornadas* in the bull ring, floods, earthquakes, automobile accidents, train wrecks—all these find their way immediately into *corridos*, for the literal meaning of the word is "current happenings." They are shot through with *vacilada*. They deal largely in personalities, and the approach of the composer, protected by anonymity, is that of the candid-camera fiend. When life is humdrum there are always the themes of love and patriotism to fall back on, the *patria* being the *patria chica*. Every singer worthy of his salt has in his repertoire a number of "hits"

dating from early revolutionary days, when there were giants in Mexico.

Soldier ballads:

*I'm a rebel of the state of Morelos,  
And I proclaim the promises of San Luis,  
I'm a rebel and I'll fight against the government,  
Because in the end it has not fulfilled anything.  
With my Winchester, my horse and three cartridge belts,  
And I display the Virgin of Tepeyac,  
So I will make respected the Plan of Ayala,  
Or I perish as a valiant liberal . . .*

Lampoons:

*Lieutenant Killseven  
Got up at ten;  
A lieutenant at eleven,  
He was a captain at twelve;  
At ten minutes past noon  
General of a division . . .*

Narratives of military exploits and of heroic deaths:

*My blood that you see flowing  
Will be avenged by Pascual Orozco . . .*

Of all the *veteranos* of the Revolution, Zapata led the field as an inspiration for *corridos*. Pancho Villa came next. The difference between the two is reflected in the nature of their respective ballad cycles. Zapata is the grim redeemer of the Indian; Pancho the hairy-chested popular hero, *el hombre de pelo en pecho*. Their men are typified by the marching songs chosen by them. The Villista favorite was the jiggling non-sensical "La Cucaracha," lusty *vacilada* when sung on a stricken field. ". . . no marihuana smoke to blow." By *vacilada* Mexicans in the know mean the effect of *marihuana*.

The Zapatista who sang "Valentina" and "Adelita" was dying for a cause, the oldest of Mexican causes.

*I'm a soldier of the Revolution  
Who defends the soil where I was born,  
So as not to see it in the power of some foreigner,  
Some oppressor who is not of the country.*

We of the United States have heard much of Pancho, too little of Emiliano Zapata. The former whooped it up right under our noses; his camp was overrun by newspapermen. The latter's operations were mostly confined to the mountains of Morelos, Guerrero and Puebla. Given the sneaking sympathy for bandits, if only they be daredevils and somewhat picturesque, which we share with the whole wide world—and it's nonsense to talk about this *afición* being merely "the frontier still in us"—it was inevitable that Villa should become a Robin Hood, a Jesse James. Even while our Punitive Expedition was floundering through the wastes of Durango and using what methods it damned well chose in trying to extract information as to Pancho's whereabouts from silent Indians, we could not be said to be wholeheartedly with it in its search. I recall distinctly hearing snickering. A little time passed and, thanks in part to Hollywood, we took Pancho and "La Cucaracha" to our hearts. Yet Villa, hero though he was and general for a time in the constitutionalist army, must go down in history as a bandit. Not so Zapata. If he was "the Attila of the South" to the Mexico City press, it was on information received from the landowners of Morelos, whose holdings he threatened. He crystallized too the fear of armed and avenging Indians which had been haunting the capital for four centuries. Twice the Zapatistas occupied Mexico City. Many of the inhabitants fled at their approach. The rest shut themselves in their homes, shivering. Yet the lean southerners glided quietly through the streets. Only horses and government property were regarded as spoils of war. No damage was done to the National Palace when they took it over.

Zapata wanted only one thing: the return of the Indian lands. He saw but one way to get them back: by force, as they had been taken. When he thought he was accomplishing that end he stopped at no ruthlessness. It was impossible, of course, that he could have effected any lasting solution of Mexico's agrarian problems. But by his terrible tenacity and fixity of purpose, by the very terror which his name put into his enemies, he made agrarianism recognized as the vital issue of the Revolution.

*Harken, educated public, to the song about our martyr,  
Verses telling you the story of Emiliano Zapata,  
Of his taking up of arms, and to fight then like a hero,  
To defend the noble cause of Francisco I. Madero.*

*On the twentieth of November when the war blazed up in  
terror,  
Was Madero in San Luis, was Zapata in his tierra;  
And Zapata helped Madero, helped him to achieve a victory,  
Feeling that the plans of each contained nothing contradic-  
tory.*

Zapata was wary, however. All his Indian suspicion of the white man had been sharpened by the action of Francisco Leyva, who, with a commission from Madero as commander of the revolutionary army of the south in his pocket, had made his peace with Díaz by betraying the plans of his co-plotters. About this time Zapata is reported to have said: "The Maderistas are not our breed; we sleep on straw *petates*."

When the Zapatistas dashed out of the mountains along the Puebla-Morelos border, captured Jonacatepec and moved on Cuautla, their leader attended personally to two things. He burned every document which might possibly constitute an *hacendado's* title to land. He left every village in possession of its *ejido*, carefully marked off. "Now defend it!" was his parting admonition.

Cuautla, lower and warmer than Cuernavaca, was a play-



ground of the rich. *Científicos* from the capital battled hang-overs in its hot sulphur springs. Zapata's dynamiters took the place in gallant style. Tin cans full of scrap iron were their hand grenades. The fuses they lighted from cigars, which many did not live to finish. If not, they died singing:

*Valentina, Valentina,  
Valentina I must say,  
I am driven by a passion,  
That's why I come here today.*

*Because of this love, they all tell me  
I'll suffer, and pay, and pay.  
Who cares, if it was the devil  
I'll be killed in my own way.*

Madero, easily triumphant over Díaz, met Zapata in the plaza of Cuautla, talked of democracy, effective suffrage, no re-election. If ever a man was sincere it was Francisco Madero. But he was speaking of ideals which would have had meaning in the United States or Europe, while the Indian was thinking of the soil and water of Morelos and of horses in tile and marble stables. Of course there was an agrarian plank in the Plan of San Luis Potosí, Madero said, trying to get a response to his embrace. The matter of restoration of the *ejidos* would be taken up after Mexico had expressed her will in the October elections. In the meantime there was no reason why the Zapatistas should remain under arms. Zapata wanted to know what General Victoriano Huerta, a friend of the *hacendados*, was doing with a detachment of troops in Cuernavaca. That was a part of the federal army, Madero told him, carrying on maneuvers. He would give orders that the Zapatistas were not to be molested. Zapata patted his gun. He and his men would disarm under those conditions. Let Madero remember, however, that there would always be bullets in Morelos for those who failed to keep their promises.

"What an impudent Indian!" Señora Madero was heard to exclaim.

The Zapatistas did begin to disarm. Madero did transmit his orders to Huerta. But that scheming general went ahead bringing the villages back into line and attempting to break the Zapatista movement. He occupied Yautepec, Cuautla, Villa de Ayala, burning every pueblo that obeyed Zapata and defended its land. He made an unsuccessful effort to capture Zapata. The latter and his followers gripped what weapons they had left and retired into the mountains. They oiled their Winchesters, sharpened their machetes to razorlike edges and, looking down at the smoky plains, swore at themselves. Every generation of Indians, it seemed, had to learn for itself that the white man was not to be trusted.

*Time passed, and Zapata waited for the promise that was made;  
Of promise and promised lands, no longer a word was said.  
Waiting for what never happened, seeing the last hope fail,  
Zapata rose up in arms, at the Hill of the Nightingale.  
If Madero has forgotten, and has furled the glorious banner,  
Though my life be the price of it, I'll make good my Plan  
de Ayala.*

*These were the words of Zapata: land and liberty for all;  
And through the state of Morelos many men came to his call.*

Neither the ballad maker nor his hero was quite fair to Madero. The latter stood, five feet two, in the midst of the Augean stables. He might have cleansed them with rivers of blood, but that wasn't his way. Had the victory over Díaz been less easily won, some discipline and organization in the revolutionary ranks might have been the result. At least issues would have been more clearly defined. As it was, Madero ran dead into two obstacles, themselves irreconcilable, within his own party: the reactionary movement and the agrarian.

Zapata's Plan of Ayala, signed on a wooden table in front of a solitary *jacal* on November 28, 1911, called for immediate expropriation of one third of the land of the haciendas

and its division among the landless. With a whoop the Zapatistas galloped to complete the work which, they were convinced, treachery had made them leave unfinished. "We must frighten them," said Zapata. "We must terrify them, because if they don't fear us they will never listen to us." Death—if he was lucky, a quick death—was dealt out to every man caught without Indian clothing on. A Zapatista general, Genevevo de la O, dynamited the engine of the Mexico City—Cuernavaca train, cut the military guard to pieces, plundered the passengers and sent the men naked into the mountains. Morelos was an inferno of burning cane fields and haciendas. . . .

Zapata might have been the means of Madero's downfall, had not more powerful forces anticipated him, men who had joined Madero for mercenary reasons and who had never truly identified themselves with his democratic purposes and ideals; the old Díaz clique, which had kept control of the army and the national and state legislatures; the clericals and *hacendados*, who saw in Madero only a threat to their long-established privileges; foreign capitalists, particularly of the United States, who had a partisan in Ambassador Henry Lane Wilson.

Leadership fell to the military, of course. Unsuccessful revolts were headed by Bernardo Reyes, former governor of Nuevo León and minister of war under Díaz; Pascual Orozco, Madero's chief lieutenant against Díaz and now tool of the Terrazas cattle barons of Chihuahua; Félix Díaz, nephew of Porfirio. Captured and brought to Mexico City, Díaz was liberated by General Mondragón and others. Then he and his forces stormed the arsenal and held it during the *Decena Trágica*, the "Tragic Ten Days." Victoriano Huerta, made commander of the army, turned against Madero. In February 1913 the latter was overpowered in the National Palace and induced to resign in order to save bloodshed. The next day General Huerta became acting president, following the resignation of Pedro Lascurain, who had held office exactly

twenty-six minutes. Four days later, while being removed from the palace to the penitentiary, Madero and Vice-President Pino Suárez were shot—while attempting to escape, the world was glibly told.

The dipsomaniac Huerta stood unsteadily on a terrace of Chapultepec, looked southward into the mountains and shivered when he thought he saw, between the bright lights of Mexico City and the stars, the red glow of Zapata's campfires—like the sacrificial fires that used to burn over Anáhuac. The boundary posts of the territory held by the Indian were said to be white men impaled on magueyes. The naked victim was spread-eagled over the plant, his hands and feet attached to the tops of stakes by narrow strips of rawhide, which pulled him taut as they dried. The hard flower stalk, shooting upward, punctured the white skin as if it were a drumhead, penetrated the belly in a day or night and split the backbone or emerged between the ribs. It kept on growing and soon *la reina Xochitl* was blooming gracefully above a skeleton. . . .

Huerta went inside and took a drink, as many another master of Grasshopper Hill had done.



## CHAPTER XVII

### La Cucaracha

"I AM SO OLD that I'm ashamed to be alive," wrote Ambrose Bierce about March 1913, when Venustiano Carranza, veteran among Díaz' hand-picked senators and minister of war under Madero, issued the Plan of Guadalupe in repudiation of the Huerta regime. The author of *In the Midst of Life* was seventy-one, but far from decrepit. He had served throughout the Civil War, with such distinction that he was brevetted major by especial act of congress; soldiering was in his blood. Like Edgar Allan Poe, he had run his hand over the Dark Curtain to ascertain the shape of what moved behind it. Lastly, he was an artist. It was natural, then, that he

should look across the Río Grande and decide to put artistry into the manner of his exit behind that curtain. . . .

Carranza's cry of *constitucionalismo*, constitutional government, had attracted many of the young generation of Mexican intellectuals: José Vasconcelos, Alberto Pani, Adolfo de la Huerta, Martín Luis Guzmán. Don Venustiano of the blue spectacles and patriarchal beard was joined also by ambitious young Sonorans who were to make the northwest dominant in Mexican affairs: Álvaro Obregón, chick-pea merchant and organizer of the Yaquis; Plutarco Elías Calles, former schoolmaster and police chief of Agua Prieta. To the Carrancista camp came a *chevalier sans peur et sans reproche*, the brilliant cosmopolite, Felipe Ángeles, with the possible exception of Obregón the ablest officer of the Revolution. "The personal code of honor of this one man was worth more than all the shouting ideals of our revolutions," Martín Luis Guzmán was to write of Ángeles in his book, *El Águila y la Serpiente* (The Eagle and the Serpent).

Pancho Villa, now in a position to make men seek him out, was appointed commander in chief of the Division of the North. John Reed described the Pancho of this period:

"He is the most natural human being I ever saw. Natural in the sense of being nearest to a wild animal. He says almost nothing and seems so quiet as to be almost diffident. His mouth hangs open, and if he isn't smiling he's looking gentle. All except his eyes, which are never still and full of energy and brutality. They are intelligent as hell and as merciless. The movements of his feet and legs are awkward—he always rode a horse—but those of his hands and arms are extraordinarily simple and direct. They're like a wolf's."

Villa went swiftly into action to consolidate his power before the inevitable break up of the combination and if possible to occupy Mexico City first. In October he captured Torreón, railway junction and shipping point for the Laguna

cotton district of Coahuila. In November he smuggled eight hundred men into Ciudad Juárez in cattle cars—like the Greeks in the Trojan Horse—and took the border city without a loss.

Sir William Tyrrell, secretary of Sir Edward Grey, British Foreign Secretary, asked Woodrow Wilson to explain his Mexican policy. "I am going to teach the South American republics to elect good men!" said the President decisively. General Hugh L. Scott was sent to El Paso, where he met Villa on the International Bridge and presented him with a copy of the Hague Convention Rules of Civilized Warfare. "Rules?" said Pancho. "Is war then a game?"

Every Huertista officer captured in Juárez had been shot. Every adherent, rank and file, of the traitor Pascual Orozco had been shot. Firing squads were busy disposing of suspected spies, with little time wasted on trials. "We'd need a jail as big as the City of Mexico to hold all these coyotes," explained Villa, "and then we'd need an army to guard them."

A story is told, with many variants, of a row of bodies of executed men seen propped against an adobe wall somewhere or other. About the neck of each was a sign: *Fusilado por espía* (Shot as a spy), *Fusilado por desertor* (Shot as a deserter) and so on. The sign on the last one read: *Fusilado por equivocación*. A mistake.

With a little tequila under their belts, officers in barracks would play *la mesa de la muerte*. A group would take places around a table and, as the lights were put out, one man would cock a loaded pistol and toss it in the air. At the explosion when it hit the table top, the lights were turned on quickly, to see that no one had been so unsporting as to duck under the table.

Mariano Azuela never had to draw on his imagination when it came to giving his *Underdogs* speech. On some subjects his prototypes in the revolutionary armies had been all too articulate. "I killed a merchant in Parral because in the change he gave me were a couple of Huerta bills." "And I killed a guy in Chihuahua because I got tired seeing him

sitting at the same table in a café." Now and then a cry of disillusion: "What a farce, my friend, if those to whom we offer all our enthusiasm, life itself, to overthrow a miserable assassin turn out to be the makers of a monstrous pedestal on which a hundred or two hundred men of the same kind can mount . . . People without ideals! People of tyrannies . . . Sorrows of the blood! . . . The psychology of our race condensed into two words! Rob! Kill!"

*La cucaracha, la cucaracha  
Ya no quiere caminar,  
Porque no tiene, porque le falta  
Maribuana que fuma-a-ar . . .*

Ambrose Bierce entered Mexico in November 1913 and joined the staff of Pancho Villa.

"To be a gringo in Mexico—that is indeed euthanasia!"

By January, when Bierce's letters ceased coming back to the States, Villa had taken Chihuahua City and ordered all Spaniards out of the state within ten days—and then had wept at sight of little graves beside large ones along the route which the fugitives, denied use of the railroad, had taken across the Bolsón de Mapimí. Impregnable there, master of two thirds of northern and central Mexico but deprived by Carranza of the coal that would have enabled him to move southward, Villa watched United States marines occupy Vera Cruz after the "Tampico Incident" and cut off Huerta's principal source of revenue, customs receipts. To the throb of Yaqui tom-toms Obregón fought his way down the Southern Pacific Railway and captured Guadalajara. Huerta sailed for Europe with two million pesos to keep him in liquor for the rest of his days, and by the middle of August 1914 Obregón was in Mexico City. Five days later Carranza made his entry, to the lilt of:

*If now I'm drinking tequila,  
Tomorrow I'll fill up on wine.*



*If today I am a poor man,  
Tomorrow I shall be gone.*

*Valentina, Valentina,  
Listen to what I shall say—  
If I'm to be dead tomorrow,  
Let them kill me right away.*

By that time Villa had resigned from the constitutionalist army, announcing that henceforth he would "operate independently for the pacification of Mexico and the establishment of constitutional government and economic reform." He was holding Chihuahua, he told someone, for the sole purpose of "showing the gringos that Carranza is a poor devil and Villa a real man."

The gringos at that moment were watching Europe, where nations instead of factional armies were at one another's throats. But events there were to have repercussion in Mexico. Mexico had oil and, as Clemenceau said, "each drop of petroleum was worth a drop of human blood."

Oil production had been rising steadily, from 220,650 barrels in 1904 to 16,558,217 in 1912, during the Madero administration. In 1913 the Penn-Mex. Fuel Company opened up the Álamo pool on the south bank of the Tuxpan River, state of Vera Cruz. In August 1914 the Águila brought in its Los Naranjos No. 4 well, in northern Amatlán. The Huasteca was soon to begin drilling in the Cerro Azul field, where a historic well ran 1,400,000 barrels before it could be capped.

No yarn ever spun about this wildcat period is too fantastic to be true. A few huts on the mud flats of the Pánuco became the city of Tampico, with its world-renowned red-light district. The fellow at your elbow at a lunch counter, blond stubble on his hard jaws, blue eyes narrowed against you and against the sun, might be a hobo from the States or an escaped convict, a younger son of a titled British family or a youth tired of Kansas haystacks. Coated with

*chapopote*, they all looked alike. A popular ballad maker described them as:

*Cursed big-footed gringos,  
Abortions of hell itself,  
Mules, vile blond ones,  
Hating our government . . .*

To get some kind of title to land, oil companies resorted to every conceivable sort of chicanery and, that failing, made use of force. Once in possession, they had gunmen to keep rivals at bay while wells were sunk and lawyers greased the palms of officialdom. Some companies thought it would be cheaper to subsidize a certain General Peláez than to pay the taxes decreed by Carranza. They realized their mistake when the bandit promptly put the screws on them for more.

The Spanish invasion had wrought no more violent a change in the ways of living of the Indians of Vera Cruz and Tamaulipas.

"Lease land any price, lease land any price."

"Scout, rent, subsoil . . . titles . . ."

"Fix titles, invent titles, invent owners . . ."

"To hell with the cost."

"Three per cent, eight per cent, three pesos, five pesos . . ."

"Hurry, Rancho Viejo, eight per cent, fix it up *pronto*."

Two Huastec parrots are mimicking a bunch of gringo oil scouts. So, somewhat in the French *surréaliste* style, that change has been described by the novelist, Xavier Icaza, one of a group of artists, dating from the Carranza period, known as the *Estridentistas*: Stridentists, noisemakers, echoers of the sound and fury of the time.

Icaza's novel, *Panchito Chapopote*, is to me the most heart-sick work that has come out of Mexico. It is the brief story of the town clerk of Tepetate "in the burning Huasteca,"

a village "of palm trees and song, of river bathing, of the perfume of vanilla, of voluptuous large-eyed women." Panchito has a field. "It produces nothing. No seed will grow in the black soil. The water of the spring that bubbles up from it is oily. It seems accursed. One would say that the mere touch of the water burns the plants." Gringo scouts talk Panchito into selling the property. He goes to Vera Cruz, blows in the money. Sick of the fleshpots, he returns to Tepetate to marry his former sweetheart and resume the old life where he left it.

"But no longer is it the ancient picturesque and smiling Tepetate. A wide asphalt street traverses it. No more palm-thatched houses, but large dwellings with wooden galleries. Bad hotels, dearer than the Ritz; twenty dollars a bed. Yankee food, Yankeeized customs. *Lonches*. Quick lunch. Free lunch. Banana lunch. No more white blouses of women appear at one's approach. There is continuous intense traffic. Heavy trucks with hardware and machinery intercept. Tank cars. Sprinkling carts. Freight trucks. Trucks jammed with workers. Automobiles with magnates from New York, from California, from London, from No Man's Land. . . .

THE AUTHOR: Die now, Panchito. I don't need you any longer. Your reason for existence has ended.

PANCHITO: What? What?

(Panchito Chapopote does not understand. He glances around interrogatively. Nobody answers. Nobody else hears this dialogue.)

THE AUTHOR: Yes, go ahead and die. You're in the way. You're not needed. Hurry up and finish. Your journey is useless now.

PANCHITO: I want to live. I want to go to the Old World on a steamship! I want to do things. I'm not harming anyone. I am good. I am not molesting. I am good.

COMMENTARIAL CHORUS: Passively good!

PANCHITO, insisting: I am good, I'm not doing anything.

THE AUTHOR: That's exactly it. You have said it. Hurry up and die. Don't stand in the way any longer.

(Panchito widens his eyes, serious and confounded. He scratches his head. He would like to understand!)

NARRATORY CHORUS: Panchito stays on in Tepetate. The rebels force money out of him. Another battle in Tepetate. In the Huasteca, towns belong to the government one day, to the rebels the next. Fighting in the streets of Tepetate. Panchito Chapopote hides in the back patio. The rebels retire. Panchito wants to take a peek. Panchito risks his head . . . Panchito wants to see. A stray bullet (a roll of drums, as at death-defying leaps in the circus), a stray bullet goes through him. PANCHITO, dying: That b— of an author put the evil eye on me!

COMMENTARIAL CHORUS: Thus ended the life of one who, when he was going to do something, did nothing. . . .

Funeral march.

VOICE FROM THE STREET: For a nickel the sad and tragic death of Panchito Chapopote! A ballad of that unfortunate death for a nickel!"

In October 1914 an attempt was made in Aguascalientes to harmonize Mexico's hostile political factions. The convention broke up with lines of cleavage more sharply defined than ever, but not before Zapata, through the eloquent Soto y Gama, had secured a hearing, his first one, for his agrarian program. Villa had made the brilliant proposal that both he and Carranza commit suicide. When Don Venustiano refused, Villistas declared that it was he and not their chief who was the obstacle to peace. A singer offered a solution in a parody on "Adelita":

Si Carranza se casa con Villa,  
Y Zapata con General Obregón,  
Si Adelita se casa conmigo,  
Pos se acabara la revolución.

*If Carranza would only marry Villa,  
And Zapata marry Obregón,  
If Adelita would only marry me,  
Revolution would be dead as a stone.*

Villa's army of the north and Zapata's agrarians were *metates* that co-operated to crush the chunk of militarism in Mexico City—and broke in the attempt.

Carranza, hard pressed, announced a program of social reform. In a series of decrees towns were freed from "the hated institution of *jefaturas políticas*" and given the right to elect their own municipal officers. Labor was provided with protective measures. Divorce was legalized. A law of January 1915, issued while Carranza controlled little more than the port of Vera Cruz, annulled all alienations of *ejidos* since the Lerdo Law of 1856 and restored them to their villages. It provided that land should be granted to those pueblos which could prove no title to communal ground. The *tienda de raya* was abolished. Haciendas and factories were required to establish schools on the premises for the children of workers. All this was so much bait offered to attract adherents to an expiring cause, but it succeeded. It brought agrarian groups who sympathized with Zapata's aims, but who could not stomach his violence. It brought support from the rising labor movement in the capital and the industrial city of Orizaba. Obregón personally had won over the leaders of the Casa del Obrero Mundial of Mexico City, striking up a particularly close friendship with an electrician by the name of Luis Morones. It was arranged that the House of Tiles should become the headquarters of this workers' organization. Varied history that building on Madero Avenue has had: colonial mansion, Jockey Club, citadel of labor—now, as Sanborn's restaurant and emporium, citadel of capitalism.

Felipe Angeles sided with Villa. He had no illusions about Pancho, but he believed that Mexico would fare better at his hands than at those of the corrupt and shiftY Carranza. The

Revolution offered no stranger spectacle than the friendship between this pair from the antipodes of society. Had Villa always deferred in military matters to the judgment of his "Angel," as punsters called the general, success might have been his. But in April 1915 Pancho went headlong against Obregón in the midst of the irrigation ditches of Celaya, twenty-nine miles west of Querétaro, and Obregón, with the aid of the "red" battalions of workers and agrarians, broke his power forever. Two thousand *Dorados* were herded into the bull ring and mowed down with machine guns. "I committed the folly of believing myself a military genius," Villa admitted afterward.

Zapata retired from Mexico City and General Pablo González was sent by Carranza to finish him. As a means of bringing the swift and deadly guerrillas to terms, González laid Morelos waste with a thoroughness which shocked even a country accustomed to the worst of civil war. At the same time he lost no opportunity to enrich himself. Zapata has been blamed for the destruction of the sugar industry in Morelos, but it was González who put the haciendas completely out of commission by stripping them of everything convertible into cash; even dynamos and the copper lining of the vats. Every captured Zapatista was forced to dig his own grave. "So you wanted the land," he was told as the firing squad got ready. "Well, take it!"

Colonel Guajardo, a subordinate of Pablo González, sent word to Zapata that he was anxious to change sides with eight hundred men. The agrarian leader demanded that he prove his good faith by taking Jonacatepec from the federals. Guajardo did so, and for good measure executed fifty-nine of his own troop who had been committing depredations upon the villages. Zapata agreed to meet him at the Chinameca hacienda, each of them to bring ten followers. The colonel's escort was lined up at the gate when the Zapatistas rode in on the afternoon of April 10, 1919. "Present arms!" commanded Guajardo, and his soldiers fired point-blank at the horsemen.

The leader fell, his hand on his gun, and with him four of his men. His body was exposed to public view in Cuautla while Colonel Guajardo received a promotion and a reward of fifty thousand pesos from Carranza.

"¡Por un quinto la trágica y dolorosa muerte de Emiliano Zapata! ¡El corrido de esa muerte desgraciada por un quinto!"

Seeing an omen of his own fate perhaps, Villa was spurred into action. In a proclamation he denounced the assassination of Zapata and declared for Felipe Ángeles as provisional president pending a constitutional election. Not only on the battlefield had Pancho been suffering defeat. Woodrow Wilson had turned against him. The A.B.C. Conference had decided against him. The United States had recognized Carranza and placed an embargo on arms which applied to all except Carranza. Several curious episodes had followed. In this country we let our toast burn while we read in the morning papers how Villa had "attacked" the United States. Pancho was undoubtedly embittered against this government. Mexicans were being lynched and terrorized right and left north of the Río Grande. He would have had no compunctions against shooting up Columbus, New Mexico. But if he and his *Dorados* were guilty of that raid some of their actions were out of character, to say the least. Questions asked by our "radical" press (*Cui bono* intervention?) remain unanswered to this day, and those mysterious well-dressed visitors to Columbus before the raid grow more sinister as they fade into the past.

Whatever the truth may be, at Villa's capture of Ciudad Juárez stray shots flew over into El Paso and two United States regiments at once tramped across the bridge. Pancho retired into Durango, knowing to what lengths Woodrow Wilson would go in his determination to teach Mexico to elect good men. As a last straw for Villa came the news that General Ángeles had been captured and executed by federal troops, he himself giving the word to fire.

"¡Por un quinto la trágica y dolorosa muerte de Felipe Ángeles!"

And Ambrose Bierce?

Our State and War Departments had been making inquiries about him, but without result. Not until 1919 did anyone come forward with an account which won general acceptance. Then George F. Weeks, a field correspondent in Mexico, told of a meeting with a young doctor of Durango who claimed to have been a close friend of Bierce's while the two were connected with Villa's forces. Urged by Weeks to investigate the writer's disappearance, Dr Melero looked up an acquaintance who had been a sergeant under Tomás Urbina, a Villista general better known as "The Butcher." The ex-sergeant recalled their capture, near the village of Icamole, of a pack train of ammunition bound for a Carrancista camp. All its guards had escaped except a Mexican and a gringo. Urbina questioned them—in Spanish, of course—but the foreigner merely shook his head. No one present had any knowledge of English. Urbina was in a hurry, so both prisoners were shot and their bodies buried in the same shallow grave. That gringo, this informant said, answered to the description given him of Ambrose Bierce.

Was it Bierce? Anyone will be skeptical who knows the inclination of Mexicans under these circumstances to give whatever answer they think will please the questioner. On the other hand versions of Bierce's end seem in remarkable agreement that he deserted Villa for Carranza. The Villista sergeant, interviewed by Bierce's lifelong friend, George Sterling, repeated the story which he had told to Dr Melero and identified a photograph of Bierce as that of the gringo whose execution he had witnessed. True, our author almost certainly knew enough Spanish to have made some reply to Urbina. But, on second thought, what would have been stranger than to find a gringo in such a place without the ability to yell at least "Americano!" in an attempt at self-preservation? Unless someone produces a more trustworthy account it looks as if we should have to accept Mr Weeks's statement: "This was



undoubtedly the fate of Ambrose Bierce—exactly the fate he had expressed a desire to meet.”

*Corridos* about Bierce should have been hawked through Mexico. Dying like a Mexican, he should have been granted one of those curious resurrections which take place down there. By 1926 this ballad was holding men spellbound in Morelos:

*They have spread, some singers,  
An extraordinary lie,  
And everybody says that now Zapata  
Rests in eternal peace.  
But if you will give me permission  
And put your trust in me,  
I am going to tell you the exact truth,  
So as to let you know just how I saw it . . .*

Zapata, we hear, was too “wise and quick witted” to be caught in any such trap as that laid by Guajardo. Another man, Jesús Delgado, put on his coat, breeches and leggings and rode jauntily to Chinameca, to die for Zapata and for *zapatismo*.

Now Zapata has a white marble tomb at Cuautla. Pilgrims go there constantly to doff straw and felt sombreros and sometimes the hats of city wear. One of the most heartfelt ceremonies to be encountered anywhere in Mexico is that held each tenth of April about the purple funeral wreaths in front of that sepulcher. Yet one still hears doubts expressed in words like those of the Zapatista of Tepoztlán whom Robert Redfield quotes:

“It is not known whether Zapata still lives or whether he really was killed as reported. Some say he is in Arabia, and will return when he is needed. For myself, I think he still lives. I know he had a scar on his cheek, and the corpse that was brought back from Chinameca had no scar. I saw myself . . .”

As with Zapata, so with Villa, the memory of a man became legend and now is a myth. During the six months' interim presidency of Adolfo de la Huerta, Pancho accepted the hacienda of Canutillo, in northern Durango, and agreed to go into retirement there. On July 20, 1923, while driving his car out of Parral on his way back to the ranch, he was shot down from ambush. The circumstances are still the subject of debate, but the assassination had all the earmarks of a political rather than a personal one, occurring as it did on the eve of the short-lived but destructive insurrection led by De la Huerta against his fellow Sonorans, Obregón and Calles. Pancho Villa and his rusticated *Dorados* might have decided the issue in favor of the rebels.

Pancho's body too was put on exhibit, in the Hotel Hidalgo of Parral, and some agency saw to it that picture post cards of his forty-seven wounds were peddled far and wide. If the purpose was to nail him in his coffin the efforts did not meet with entire success. While ballad singers in Durango and Chihuahua and Coahuila repeat that "Pancho Villa was a rude man but a greathearted one, who with education would have become president," some of their listeners will assure one: "Pancho isn't dead. They only try to trick us."

"Who's trying to trick you?"

A shrug and perhaps a blank glance at my city clothes. "¿Quién sabe? But he will come back presently."

The outstanding victim of the De la Huerta insurrection was Felipe Carrillo Puerto of Yucatán. "We have used force, now let us use love," he told his Mayas after his election in 1922. During his twenty-two months as governor he put into practice the social reforms which in most of the other states were merely talked about. Yucatán prospered and Felipe built more roads than all the Yucatecan governors since the Conquest. In an effort to avoid futile bloodshed when the Mérida garrison rose for De la Huerta, he refused to allow his followers to defend him. After a farce of a trial he and three of his brothers were put to death.

Now every visitor to Mérida sees the tomb of Felipe Carrillo Puerto and the quarters of his *Ligas de Resistencia*, with their red and black banners.

*Colors for us to remember,  
Red and Black of our Revolution.*

Everyone who stays any length of time hears *corridos* about the Martyr of Yucatán, how he will return someday, not to the clatter of horses' hoofs like Zapata and Villa, but with gentleness and a hand raised in blessing; how he will repeat, if need be, the words which he used at a ceremony whereby a church became a community center:

"In the name of Jesus, you have been betrayed. In the name of Jesus, you have been driven under the lash. In the name of your ancient gods, I declare you free."

## CHAPTER XVIII

# The Arm of Obregón

FÉLIX PALAVICINI, founder of the Mexico City newspaper *El Universal*, has divided the Revolution into four phases: the lyrical, ending with the murder of Madero; the warring, extending through 1916; the social, climaxed by the constitution of 1917; and the constructive, beginning with the inauguration of President Obregón, December first, 1920.

The meeting of the constitutional convention in Querétaro has rightly been termed the most important single event in the history of the Revolution. Carranza himself had little interest in social reform. His main purposes in calling the convention were to have his own position as dictator legalized and to have his name associated, like that of Juárez, with a code of laws. But the "radical" element which had helped him defeat Villa now asserted its right to be heard, with the result that the constitution, as promulgated in February 1917, embodied the reforms contained in the various laws and decrees which Carranza had issued as head of the constitutionalist army. Ironically, then, the social program of the Revolution had its inception, not in theory, but in the military necessity of an *hacendado* of the old school.

This reform group was led by General Francisco Múgica, inspired by Andrés Molina Enríquez and backed by General

Obregón. Palavicini, now Mexican ambassador to Argentina, was a spokesman for the conservatives. Molina Enríquez, for the past thirty years professor of aboriginal ethnography in the National Museum, was last heard from in erudite defense of President Cárdenas' expropriation of foreign landholdings.

Article 123, which Mexican labor looks to as its Magna Charta, was intended for the protection of both industrial and agricultural wage earners. It provided for legislation covering an eight-hour day, a minimum wage, special protection for women, abolition of child labor, peonage and the *tienda de raya*, the housing of workers and the establishment of schools by employers, profit sharing, compensation for occupational sickness and accidents and for dismissals without proper cause, hygienic and safety measures in factories, the right of both employers and workers to organize; the right to strike or shut down, according to regulations; the establishment of boards of arbitration for the settlement of industrial disputes; legalization of labor contracts, collective and individual; social security measures.

This during the World War, mind you, and in a country which could not be called an industrial one. Molina Enríquez and Francisco Múgica had taken the most progressive items of labor legislation which had been adopted or advocated in the most progressive capitalist nations and worked them into a code which gave Mexican labor a legal status enjoyed by workers of no other country at that time. Not that the adoption of the constitution signified that these provisions had the full force of law. The first clause of Article 123 provides that congress and the state legislatures shall enact laws in conformity with the principles outlined and with regard for local conditions. The Federal Labor Law of 1931 put some of these provisions into effect, but not all. The others at least remain in the constitution.

Article 27, containing an amplification of Carranza's agrarian law of 1915, was a declaration of Mexico's intent to annul the two most onerous results of the Díaz dictatorship: the

alienation of the *ejidos* and the acquisition of mines and oil fields by foreigners.

"The ownership of lands and waters . . . is vested originally in the nation, which . . . has the right to transmit title thereto to private persons, thereby creating private property.

"Expropriation can only be made for reasons of public utility and with indemnification.

"The nation shall have at all times the right to impose upon private property such restrictions as the public interest may require, as well as the right to regulate the development of natural resources . . . in order to conserve and equitably distribute the public wealth . . .

"In the nation is vested direct ownership of all minerals or substances (in the subsoil), solid mineral fuels, petroleum and all hydrocarbons—solid, liquid, or gaseous . . .

"The ownership of the nation is inalienable . . . Concession shall be granted to private parties or . . . corporations organized under the laws of Mexico, only on condition that said resources be regularly developed, and on the further condition that the legal provisions be observed.

"Legal capacity to acquire ownership shall be governed by the following provisions:

"Only Mexicans by birth or naturalization and Mexican companies have the right to acquire ownership in lands, waters and their appurtenances, or to obtain concessions to develop mines, waters, or mineral fuels in the republic of Mexico. The nation may grant the same right to foreigners, provided they agree before the Department of Foreign Relations to be considered Mexicans in respect to such property, and accordingly not to invoke the protection of their governments in respect to the same, under penalty, in case of breach, of forfeiture to the nation of property so acquired . . ."

Of Article 27, Frank Tannenbaum has written: "It attempts to reduce all property in Mexico to 'conditional ownership.' It permits the juxtaposition of all types of ownership, from the

nomadic group having nothing more than a vague sense of right to use, to that of the modern corporation with its complex titles, privileges and prerogatives . . . As long as this article governs property rights, all property is subject to such changes and limitations (*modalidades*) as the legislative power may from time to time see fit to give it. Property in fee simple has ceased to exist in law, so far as Mexico is concerned, though it may and can exist in fact, providing the legislative powers concede the special conditions under which such control may be exercised. This is the most significant legal outcome of the Mexican Revolution."

Article 27 contained no new definition of property rights. It was entirely in accord with a tradition which went back four hundred years. Molina Enríquez calls it "the complete juridical expression of the nature of property among us and of the workings of the Law of Reversion," whereby the king of Spain could revoke all rights to the property which he had granted as concessions, contingent upon use. "Whether our conception of property be good or bad," continues Mexico's spokesman, "we have the sovereign right to formulate it according to our best knowledge and understanding, and no foreign power can impose upon us a conception other than that which we have formed."

Since 1917 the revolutionary struggle has been to maintain the constitution and to put its provisions into effect. For all Carranza's shortcomings, we must acknowledge the Revolution's indebtedness to him to this extent: He accepted the constitution with what grace he could and gave official sanction to it. He moved tentatively toward enforcement of Article 27 by decree. A production tax on oil, first levied by Madero, was increased. The United States government thought that the action "savored of confiscation." A decree called on the petroleum companies to file their titles on lands where exploitation was intended. Another required them to make a declaration within three months of intention to drill, otherwise the Mexican government would grant subsoil conces-

sions to other parties, regardless of the surface ownership. Notes from the State Department that the United States could not accept the constitutional principle of governmental ownership of the subsoil whether enforced by "decrees or by law" prevented the application of these decrees, but Mexico had at least served notice that it stood by that principle.

Carranza lost no time in asserting national ownership of the *terrenos baldíos* which had been alienated under Díaz, but land distribution he reduced to a minimum, taking this function out of the hands of local authorities and entrusting all agrarian reform to a National Agrarian Commission. He repressed labor's every move, closing La Casa del Obrero Mundial and applying martial law to strikers. The Mexican Federation of Labor, the C.R.O.M. (*Confederación Regional Obrera Mexicana*), met with his stern opposition when it was organized at Saltillo in 1918. The next year its secretary, Luis Morones, with his secret *Grupo Acción* formed the Mexican Labor party to sponsor the presidential candidacy of Obregón. When Carranza attempted to impose a tool of his, Calles and Adolfo de la Huerta had but to issue the Plan of Agua Prieta, calling for the replacement of Carranza by a provisional president until an election could be held, and to make a show of force. The country cheered them, and Carranza prepared to join what Zapata had called "the procession of those who proceed hastily to Vera Cruz."

When he had packed five million pesos in gold and silver belonging to the national treasury, Carranza telegraphed to General Guadalupe Sánchez, commandant at Vera Cruz, inquiring as to his loyalty. "President and Father," replied the general, "though everyone else betray you, I shall not. If but one man remain loyal to you I am that man." General Sánchez attacked the presidential train and drove Carranza into the mountains of Puebla, where he was shot on May 21, 1920, the day that the troops of the "Revindicating Revolution" took possession of the capital.

According to one story, the soldiers who entered the *jacal*



where Carranza had taken refuge found him dying by his own hand, his blue spectacles carefully adjusted upon his nose. I can believe the part about the spectacles. Don Venustiano made too little appeal to the popular imagination for anyone to bother about embellishing his death scene. I never heard a *corrido* in which he played the part of hero, whereas there are dozens about "*El Brazo de Obregón*," the arm which the general lost while fighting Villa on the field of La Trinidad in 1915.

"I am better for Mexico, for the simple reason that with only one arm I can't steal as much as the others," joked the man who took office after Adolfo de la Huerta had obliged him by filling out Carranza's term, in order to satisfy the constitutional provision by which a presidential incumbent cannot succeed himself.

Álvaro Obregón was a hardheaded businessman who, while ruling Mexico as a virtual dictator, made a fortune for himself out of his monopoly of chick-peas. The chick-pea growers made no complaint. They were accustomed to monopolists, and Don Álvaro left them a larger margin of profit than had the ones before him. The Labor party had been instrumental in putting Obregón into office. He paid the debt with official support for the C.R.O.M. in its war to the knife with independent unions, then, to counterbalance the power of the Morones organization, threw his support to the rival *Agrarista* party headed by Díaz Soto y Gama.

With the agrarians too Obregón adopted a cautious policy. He had no mind to destroy the hacienda system, believing that to do so would bring Mexico to economic ruin. Yet the ghost of Zapata rode through the south, and no sensible man would shut his eyes to it. So the million families of workers residing on haciendas got no help, but some of the two million families in the free villages did. Landless pueblos were to make application to state agrarian commissions, which were authorized to award grants from near-by haciendas, to the amount of from seven to twenty acres for each family, all such grants



being subject to the approval of the National Agrarian Commission. *Hacendados* were to receive compensation in government bonds, redeemable—according to the law—in twenty years.

The majority of landholders refused to acquiesce in the expropriations by accepting compensation. By their obstruction then and later, insists Andrés Molina Enríquez, they have justified the law's course in exercising the right to extinguish their equity. "The Law of Reversion makes it possible for the sovereignty to do this without creating any right to indemnification. However, though no legal right to indemnification has been contracted, and though the land does not, strictly speaking, belong to the landowners but to the nation, our government has, from *moral* considerations, offered to pay just indemnities in every instance where the occupation has been for *ejidos*. Our government has always offered to pay these indemnities, but it is absolutely impossible to *exact* this pay-

ment of us, much less on the basis of what other countries understand as *property rights*, something entirely different from what property rights are among us."

As it was, some three million acres were distributed among six hundred and twenty-four villages during Obregón's presidency.

There were many many flies in the ointment, as was to be expected: red tape, inefficiency and corruption in the commissions, intimidation of villagers by "white guards" of the *hacendados*, intimidation by the clergy, who threatened those who accepted land with the wrath of God in the shape of plagues and famines. The *ejido* was to be cultivated communally, under the supervision of an administrative committee composed of the *presidente municipal*, descendant of the old *cacique*, and of half a dozen village leaders, the "principal men" of Spanish days. An instance of the resultant exploitation was cited by a senator from Durango in a speech before the upper house of congress in 1925. The head of the committee in the pueblo of Vicente Guerrero was exacting a hectoliter of corn or five pesos and thirty-five centavos in cash, plus fifteen per cent of the harvest, in return for distributing to the villagers plots in their own *ejido*. Consequently many were abandoning it. The senator, himself an agrarian, stated that this was happening not only in fifty or sixty pueblos of Durango but throughout the republic. Even villagers receiving land under the most favorable of circumstances usually found themselves without seeds, implements, credit facilities or scientific training.

A start in the right direction had been made, however, and, as Mr J. H. Plenn puts it, "when the two-bit words are trimmed away the agrarian problem is just another everyday bread-and-butter problem."

Another obstacle in the way of effective agrarian reform was the attitude of the United States government, which was withholding recognition of Obregón until it saw how this issue, and more particularly the linked one of mineral rights,

was going to affect the pocketbooks of some of its citizens. Too the State Department of Charles E. Hughes had the fixed idea that the Mexican government was communistic, all the while Obregón was engaged in deporting foreign-born communists—and finding that most of them had come from the United States.

Obregón, knowing that recognition would be a deciding factor in case of trouble over the succession to the presidency, made no effort to apply the provisions of Article 27 to the foreign oil companies, but limited himself to imposing taxes on them, taxes which they loudly denounced as confiscatory. The Mexican government got no hearing when it cited legislation in the United States of a confiscatory character: the abolition of slavery after the Civil War; the Eighteenth Amendment, which destroyed huge investments, some of them foreign, in breweries and distilleries; the anti-Japanese land laws of California. Propaganda of the oil and other interests caused feeling to run high in the United States. Mexicans were mobbed with the usual impunity. Citizens of Weslaco, Texas, celebrated Armistice Day, 1922, by taking Elías Zárate from the jail and lynching him. Three hundred brawny Texans warned all Mexicans to leave Breckenridge. . . .

The point of contention since the Mexican constitution was promulgated had been the retroactivity of Article 27. Obregón was ready with assurances here. In various official notes his administration promised that "all rights of property acquired prior to May 1, 1917 . . . will be respected and protected. The famous Article 27, one of the clauses whereof declares the petroleum deposits of the subsoil to be the property of the nation, will not have retroactive effect." Washington wanted this promise put into a treaty. Obregón refused, considering the demand insulting. It has been said, however, that his wish for a peaceful settlement of the dispute was reflected in the decisions handed down by the Mexican Supreme Court in the five test cases brought by the Texas Company and others. In these the court held that subsoil rights acquired prior to the

promulgation of the constitution were not affected by this last, provided there had been some "positive act" indicating that the land had been obtained for the purpose of exploiting its oil deposits. Payment of an abnormally high purchase price constituted a "positive act," as did drilling arrangements.

With the edge taken off the hostility of the petroleum magnates, Obregón played the bankers of the United States against them. By the debt settlement which his secretary of the treasury, Adolfo de la Huerta, negotiated with Thomas Lamont in 1922, Mexico undertook to resume interest payments to foreign bondholders, nine years in default. The cash was to come from taxes paid by the oil companies. This paved the way for a diplomatic conference in the summer of 1923 and for the Bucareli agreements, whereby Mexico was to compensate United States citizens for damages suffered in the Revolution, the amount to be fixed by a claims commission. In the course of these conferences the Mexican representatives, Fernando González Roa and Ramón Ross, reaffirmed Obregón's policy of interpreting Article 27 as nonretroactive.

The one-armed president got his recognition on August 30. In December he was buying munitions from the United States to put down the De la Huerta revolt. The secretary of the treasury had let enemies of Calles talk him into resisting Obregón's decision to pass the presidency on to the head of his cabinet. De la Huerta had the support of a heterogeneous group: labor unions which were holding out against the C.R.O.M., *hacendados* who wanted to check agrarian reform, army officers who wanted loot; the inactive generals Salvador Alvarado and Antonio Villareal and liberals like them who knew that Calles, while regarded as leader of the left wing in the ruling clique, had little respect for constitutional liberties. Obregón charged that the British oil companies aided the rebels. Certainly one could smell *chapopote* at every turn in the political game. Edward L. Doheny took advantage of Obregón's financial straits to pay ten million pesos advance taxes into the treasury in return for govern-

mental recognition of the right of companies to drill on land where titles representing thirty-five per cent of the property were held.

But the De la Huerta movement was at bottom the typical *cuartelazo*. Instead of demobilizing his generals Obregón had lifted elbows with them, even letting his secretary of war, Francisco Serrano, pay his gambling debts with vouchers on the national treasury. Now thirty-six generals in active service "pronounced." In three months De la Huerta was hurrying to Los Angeles to give singing lessons, and the way was clear for the election of Calles in the summer of 1924. Mexico might have got a little compensation for the bloody episode out of the fact that so many treacherous army officers were killed off, but Obregón only created fifty-four new generals.

A loss to the Revolution for which the De la Huerta outbreak was responsible was that of the services of José Vasconcelos as minister of education. This Oaxacan has shown so many sides to the world that it is next to impossible to characterize him satisfactorily while there may be another side of him yet to be seen, although I think that anyone who reads his *Estética* will agree with Jiménez Rueda that Vasconcelos, called a lawyer by profession, a philosopher by inclination, a man of letters by temperament, is "one of the most powerful and original intellects which Spanish America has produced."

His record in the early nineteen-twenties is sufficient to condone all his shortcomings. Vasconcelos had never taught when Obregón gave him the portfolio but, while working for the establishment of a Federal Department of Education, he had formulated his program: "Redeem the Indian, educate the masses," a program which must win the support of the educated classes before it could be carried out. He went to work energetically, but even as he worked that program gave way to a new one—boomeranged back, as it were. It developed that the white man, the urban literate class, stood in need of re-education.

The triumph of the Revolution on the battlefield had meant

the repudiation both of the Spanish theory that the Indian was a child and of the *Científico* theory that he was an inferior being. But if the Indian was racially the equal of the white, it followed that Indian cultural patterns, persisting as they had since pre-Columbian times, must be as valid as those transplanted from Europe. Therefore the loss would be Mexico's if these patterns were destroyed and alien ones put in their place, as had been proposed. They must be preserved, cultivated, integrated into the whole Mexican pattern. The Indian had been absorbing those European cultural traits, material and nonmaterial, which were adapted to his needs. Now the Mexican of European culture must absorb some Indian traits.

This was a realization, which has come to few countries in this world, of the fact that mixed blood is an asset, not a liability.

There was a shift of emphasis in education from the individual to the community, from teaching children their A B Cs to a search in their homes and villages for what of value the parents could contribute to Mexican culture. The teachers whom Vasconcelos sent out, at the pay of manual laborers, over mountain trails and into the deserts went as "missionaries," successors to the priests. Each rural school established—and Vasconcelos built nearly a thousand of them—became a nucleus of cultural diffusion and infusion. It was a heady gospel, and the preaching of it was Vasconcelos' contribution to the Revolution.

Endeavor like this is in danger of becoming impractical, of course, a touristlike ohing and ahing over the primitive. It needs the directing hand of a scientist, and Vasconcelos had the co-operation of Dr Manuel Gamio, head of the Bureau of Anthropology. Dr Gamio had expressed his ideas in a book, *Forjando Patria* (Welding a Fatherland). Governments must study their people and territory, understand them as one. "Otherwise they are doomed to failure, for they cannot logi-

cally rule people whose nature and way of living they ignore; and the people, unable to live under systems arbitrarily forced upon them, will vegetate, degenerate and weaken, or will explode their justified protest in revolutions." Dr Gamio had spent eight years in an intensive study of the population of the Valley of Teotihuacán, every phase of its economic, social and artistic life. Thus he was prepared to develop his theory of "integral education" in practice.

Why begin a child's education with the three Rs if he will seldom or never have occasion to use this knowledge outside the school? Dr Gamio demanded. Why lecture him for five minutes a day on cleanliness if he goes back home to a dirt floor over which pigs and chickens wander freely? His thesis is that only education applied to a whole community and embracing its entire way of life will serve in rural Mexico.

The excavation of the pyramids and of the Temple of Quetzalcoatl having been largely Dr Gamio's work, he was permitted to charge each visitor to these monuments a small fee. With the proceeds he built a school and established a clinic for prenatal and infant care. He and the Teotihuacanos constructed an open-air theater, where regional plays were performed. He introduced improvements in agricultural methods. He uprooted nothing, but took what he found and worked with the inhabitants to improve it. Teotihuacano pottery was inferior stuff, brown or black only. Dr Gamio introduced the use of pigments, locally derived, and improved the serviceability of the ware, all without altering in the slightest the rhythmic native designs. In the Valley of Teotihuacán grows a species of poppy, the *chicalote*, whose prickly foliage makes it a nuisance to farmers. Dr Gamio found that an oil for soap making could be extracted from it. At Chapingo, near Texcoco, government planners had built a co-operative town for workers and peasants, with bungalows the last word in sanitation and efficiency, with a community assembly hall and community kitchen, with streets named Street of Social Foresight, Street of the Proletariat, Street of Worker's Sav-



ings. Indians simply wouldn't live there. Dr Gamio put up a model house out of valley materials. It differed from the homes of the Teotihuacanos in only a few respects. It had a chimney and windows. It had three rooms instead of one, so that a family could cook, eat and sleep in separate rooms.

Dr Gamio urged that this procedure should be followed throughout Mexico. Anthropologists should make a survey of each region and of its inhabitants; teachers should adapt their methods to the findings of those surveys. But there was more. "It was necessary," Dr Gamio wrote, "that a painter, a true painter, of sound technique, broad vision, highly sensitive, and with a keen analytic point of view, be sent to live in the valley, to identify himself with the brilliant blue heaven, the hostile arid mountains, the eternally verdant plains, with the aged colonial temples of stately legend, the timeless ruins breathing mythological drama and with the stark huts grasped in the claws of the magueyes and the cacti . . . He must live with and become the brother of the native of the valley, accept for himself so long as he remained the customs, the ideals, the pain, the pleasure, the beliefs and amusements of that man."

There was no dearth of painters to choose from, for José Vasconcelos had become the most generous patron the arts had ever had in Mexico. The walls of the Secretariat of Education and of the National Preparatory School were being covered with those frescoes which now are familiar to all the world, frescoes which give proof for all to see of what the Indian had to contribute to Mexican civilization. Dr Gamio sent Francisco Goitia to Teotihuacán.

José Vasconcelos seems to have been unmoved by the murder of Felipe Carrillo Puerto, but when the thugs of Morones killed the De la Huerta spokesman in congress and kidnaped four of his associates he resigned in protest: an inconsistency typical of the man. Calles appointed Dr José M. Puig Casauranc to the Secretariat of Education. Dr Gamio was named subsecretary, although, foreseeing the impossibility of carry-

ing on his work under a man who, though intelligent enough, had no qualifications for his position, the anthropologist had asked that a "Department of Indigenous Culture" be created. Five months later Dr Gamio protested to Calles against graft in the department and was discharged.

Had Calles died—"been killed," one would naturally say in Mexico—when his term of office was about half completed, one could find a great deal to say in his favor. He began by pushing agrarian reform, so that the record for his four years is the distribution of eight million acres to fifteen hundred villages. He sought solutions to the problems which had arisen under Obregón. To prevent abuse of power by the village *políticos*, the *ejidos* were to be divided into individual lots as soon as granted. A series of agricultural banks was created to loan money to small farmers. Many benefited, although the greater part of the loans were soon going to *hacendados* with political influence. This was symptomatic of the change that was taking place in Calles. His friends, the members of his cabinet, everyone who could rely on his protection, were making money in those prosperous days, mostly in construction and consumption industries. Morones, secretary of industry, virtual dictator of Mexican labor, was wearing expensive diamond rings on his fat fingers: a reserve fund which the working class could use in time of need, he said. The C.R.O.M. had even organized a union among the prostitutes of the Federal District. The girls on Cuauhtemoc Street, as well as members of all the other Morones-dominated unions, got something in return for their dues, of course. But the *Grupo Acción* was soon turning up its collective nose at paltry dues. It bled capitalists and threw parties on the proceeds. Out at Tlalpam Morones and his friends built a country estate, with swimming pools and a *frontón* court. . . .

Calles, while calling himself a socialist, was surrounded by capitalists of his own nationality, and he had begun to go over to them, unconsciously perhaps, when Dwight Morrow of the House of Morgan arrived and—with the best inten-

tions in the world—linked arms with the Mexican president and escorted him into the capitalistic camp.

In 1925 congress passed a law declaring that petroleum rights acquired prior to 1917 would be "confirmed by fifty-year concessions," dating from the time of acquisition and renewable for thirty years. At the same time Calles announced his intention of creating extensive oil reserves and promoting government drilling. The battle was on again, hotter than before. Secretary of State Kellogg sent a series of notes, pointing out that the law was in contravention of the assurances given by Obregón in 1923. These assurances had not been embodied in a treaty, but Mr Kellogg insisted that Calles was morally bound by them. A concession, he said, is not a confirmation of existing rights, therefore legislation which compelled the exchange of ownership for leases was retroactive and confiscatory.

The Mexican government replied that the companies' right to the oil was not affected, since no well had been known to last fifty years. If by any chance oil remained at the end of that period a thirty years' extension would be granted. Mexico wished to put into practice its constitutional principle that ownership of subsoil deposits is vested in the nation. This principle was already effective for holdings acquired subsequent to 1917 and for all Mexican holdings. There could not be two laws, one concerning rights acquired prior to 1917 and another for those acquired subsequently. Nor could there be one law for nationals and another for aliens.

December 31, 1926, was the deadline for compliance with the new law. A number of oil magnates, most of whom were generally known to have faulty titles, refused to obey and called for intervention. Public opinion in the United States was against them. Two of the most vociferous interventionists were Albert B. Fall and E. L. Doheny, and people had not forgotten Teapot Dome and Elk Hills. The New York *World* published figures indicating that out of 666 foreign oil companies in Mexico, all but twenty-two had obeyed the law and

that forty-six per cent of the oil land controlled by these twenty-two companies was dominated by Doheny.

In the fall of 1927 Ambassador Sheffield was recalled and Mr Morrow appointed in his place. As a result of Morrow's mediation an amended petroleum law was passed early in 1928, granting concessions in perpetuity for subsoil rights acquired prior to 1917. This was little more than a return to the Bucareli agreements, for the Mexican government did not give way on the essential point. All rights held by the oil companies remained concessions. And inherent in a concession, Mexicans say, is the right of the owner to cancel.

Meanwhile election time was at hand and with it the usual barrack revolt. Calles had had the constitution amended so that Obregón could return to the presidency, for six years instead of four. Generals Francisco Serrano and Arnulfo Gómez were speedily disposed of, and Obregón was the only candidate when voters went to the polls.

Obregón (O'Brien the name was not so many generations back) was what Mexicans call *vividor*, a man who enjoys life to the full; so on July 17, three weeks after his re-election, some Guanajuato politicians gave him a banquet in the garden of La Bombilla Restaurant at San Ángel. Shortly after one o'clock in the afternoon José de León Toral, a young newspaper cartoonist, had a beer in the bar, then wandered into the garden where bougainvillaea ran along the old stone walls and covered wooden kiosks. Toral had a sketch pad in his hand. He made a caricature of the orchestra leader, then approached the banquet table and made one of Obregón, which he showed to the men seated on either side of the red-faced general. As he stepped to Obregón's right side, where the stump of the lost arm was, Toral drew a pistol from the inside pocket of his coat, hiding it under the pad. Obregón half turned and looked up at him. Everyone present remembered that the orchestra was playing loudly. Toral remembered that Obregón's glance was friendly. The cartoonist pulled the trigger once and nine shots went into Obregón's

neck and shoulder blade. He gave a low moan, made as if to rise, but slumped down in his chair. The third bullet had reached his heart.

Toral, who unfortunately for himself did not get to use the cartridge which he had kept in reserve, was a Catholic. He said that he had killed Obregón to save the Church from further persecution and Obregón's soul from damnation.

## CHAPTER XIX

# Rosaries and Rifles

"WHEN we arrived at the great market place we were astounded at the number of people and the quantity of merchandise that it contained, and at the good order and control that was maintained . . . Each kind of merchandise was kept by itself and had its fixed place marked out . . . great pieces of cloth and cotton and articles of twisted thread . . . beans and sage and other vegetables and herbs . . . fowls, cocks with wattles (turkeys), rabbits, hares, deer, mallards . . . cooked food, dough and tripe . . . every sort of pottery made in a thousand different forms from great water jars to little jugs . . . honey and honey paste and other dainties like nut paste . . . lumber, boards, cradles, beams, blocks and benches . . . gourds and gaily painted jars made of wood. I could wish that I had finished telling of all the things which are sold there, but they are so numerous and of such different quality and the great market place with its surrounding arcades was so crowded with people, that one would not have been able to see and enquire about it all in two days."

Even to most of the articles enumerated Bernal Díaz' description of the *tianguis* at Tlaltelolco can only be repeated by one who attempts to describe the *mercado* of present-day Oaxaca, the greatest in Mexico, or that of Toluca, the second greatest, where we milled about one August morning bargain-

ing for sarapes. Geometric and terrace designs in black on natural wool tones, products of the valley at the foot of the Sierra de Toluca in which the capital of the state of Mexico lies. Crimson and black patterns from León, in Guanajuato. Dark blue and gray from Tlaxcala. Sky blue and white or gray, with swastikas or geometric plant designs, from Texcoco. Rainbow stripes concentric about Oaxacan idols . . .

“¿Cuánto?”

“Treinta pesos, señor.”

“What did he say? Thirty. Too much. *Demasiado*.”

“Pues, mire, señor. Es de lana, pura lana.” And the merchant invites his prospective customer to finger a certain strand.

“Wool?” exclaims the customer, fingering another strand.

“Why, this is cotton. *Algodón*.”

“No, no, señor. Es de lana.”

“What do you say, Mr Downing? Would you call this sarape wool or cotton?”

Mr Downing hems and haws and gives as his considered opinion that it's both. Before he can be pinned down as to which material he thinks predominates he calls attention to design and color—matters which, in all honesty, interest him more.

And baskets, Toluca's specialty. “Are these real Indian baskets?” people ask. I am never sure just what they mean, but it is safe to answer in the affirmative. Baskets here, as elsewhere in the Aztec area, are of three forms. Two of these, without handles, have remained unchanged in general character since pre-Columbian days. Both are used for the storage and transport of food and may be carried by either sex. The *chiquihuite*, the tourist's favorite, is tubelike, stiff, as wide as it is deep. The *tompate* is flexible, woven of soft reed, and twice as deep as it is wide. The third has the shape of the ordinary European market basket and is carried only by women, on the left arm under the *rebozo*. Probably a form introduced by the Spaniards, it has no native name, being called *canasta*, the general word for “basket.” Yet it, like the others, is made of maguey





fiber, and its colored designs of people, animals and flowers are—except in some sad cases where the influence of a middleman may be seen—Indian.

Leaving Toluca on the highway that shoots eastward through the summertime marshes of the Río de Lerma, on the lookout for marker 44.5 and the dirt road branching off to the south, we passed the usual procession of men and women, market bound, with their own backs and the backs of their burros loaded high with homemade merchandise. The sight of some sarapes brought from the person who had just purchased one the remark that he could probably have struck a bargain here for less than fourteen pesos. He was promptly reminded that rarely are Indians willing to sell their goods en route to market.

The generally accepted explanation for their refusal is that they don't want to miss the give-and-take of the *mercado*, the periodic contact with friends from other villages in that trading area. This would have been the explanation of Father Diego Durán, who wore himself out trying to make Indians over after the Conquest. "I think," he wrote, "that if one was to say to one of those Indian women who love to wander round the markets, 'Listen, today is market day in such and such a place; which will you choose, to go straight to heaven or go to the market?' I suspect that she would say, 'Let me first see the market, and after that I will go to heaven,' and she would be quite contented to lose that period of glory just so that she could go to the market, and go wandering round here and there without any purpose save to satisfy her greedy desire to see it."

Yet I have wondered if a long-lived superstition isn't at work here. In pre-Conquest times it was considered unlucky to sell an object en route to the *tianguis*, so very unlucky that an Aztec law actually prohibited such a transaction.

So it is with the nettle religious question, these analogies being called to my mind by the fact that we were on our way that morning to the celebrated old shrine of Chalma, in a

southern corner of the state of Mexico near the Morelos border.

In practice Mexican religion is a blend, harmonious for the most part, and before one can affirm that it is predominantly pagan or Catholic, Indian or Spanish, wool or cotton, there has to be an assorting and counting of strands. That's a job for an expert with infinite patience, a job I would think about twice before tackling. To me the color and design of that religion are essentially Indian and I am satisfied to take the word of the social scientists that analysis of the fabric bears me out.

"The Mexican people are not Catholics," declares Ernest Gruening. "Of the fifteen million *nominal* Catholics who inhabit Mexico, at most two millions are Catholics in the sense accepted in the United States, an equal or larger number are agnostic or indifferent, and the remainder while observing in their worship some of the outward form of Roman Catholicism are in reality pagans."

There is the answer to the question that I heard asked on June 29, 1929, when the clangor of bells announced to Mexico City that after three years' absence from the churches the clergy were again celebrating mass. "Why," United States citizens wanted to know, "have the Mexicans let themselves be deprived of services so long?"

The second year of the Calles administration saw the outbreak of open warfare between government and church, an event forecast by the latter's support of the De la Huerta revolt. In January 1926 *El Universal* of Mexico City published a repudiation of the constitution of 1917, signed by all archbishops and bishops. Archbishop Mora y del Río followed this up with three announcements of a campaign against "laws that were unjust and against natural right." The government took these as a challenge and adopted legislation providing for the enforcement of those provisions in the constitution of 1917 which had reaffirmed and gone beyond the Reform Laws in an effort to drive the Church out of politics and to destroy

its social influence. In accordance with Article 3, secularizing primary instruction, the government closed Catholic primary schools and nunneries. It deported foreign priests, Article 130 providing that ministers of religion must be Mexican by birth. On July 31 a law went into effect requiring priests to enter their names in an official register.

Acting under orders from the episcopate the clergy not merely ignored the law but withdrew from the churches on that day. For the first time since 1519 Mexico was without Catholic services—except, of course, for clandestine masses in the homes of those who could afford to pay stiff prices for them. Fewer disturbances resulted than either side had expected, and those mostly in centers of intense devotion. In Guadalajara the congregation of the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Guadalupe threw stones from the Carmelite belfries and was routed out with machine guns.

The Church had made a blunder, far-reaching in its consequences. The great mass of Mexicans, villagers, went ahead with their worship, unaffected by the varying fortunes of the clergy in its conflict with the government. What little hold priests had on the Indians they lost, for the Indians found that they could get along just as well—and much more cheaply—without white men in robes.

Instead of closing the churches, the government put a committee of ten citizens in charge of each. Local pride was aroused, and in an Indian community no lesson in co-operation was needed. Men and women coming as usual to light candles, kneel and pray before an altar, found the doors open. They knew the way to the altar.

Religious life and the organization of the Catholic Church have always been two distinct matters to the Indian. The first is vital to him. His religion is local, autonomous—the religion of his village, if it is small; otherwise, of his *barrio*. Before the Conquest each *calpulli* had its own god. Now each *barrio* has its *santo*, in whose defense its members will die. But tell an Indian that the *santo* of the adjoining *barrio* or of a pueblo

in the next valley has been desecrated and he will only express regret, as good manners demand. Often one can detect a bit of sly satisfaction, if the man thinks that the people of the other *santo* have been putting on airs. Only Our Lady of Guadalupe, Our Lord of Chalma and a few others with a great reputation for miraculous power can attract devotion from outside their localities.

Huixquilucan is an Otomí village in the hills above Dos Ríos, a station on the Mexico City-Toluca railway line. A feature of its annual carnival (probably a survival of the *combate* of early Spanish carnivals) may be seen repeated in many Mexican pueblos. Men of the *barrio* of San Martín and those of San Juan demonstrate their rivalry by throwing stones and shouting insults across the boundary line. The patron of San Juan is the *Virgen de la Candelaria*. Every year she is reproached for her habit of slipping away from her *barrio* to spend the night with San Martín of the hat and cape.

Prior to 1926 the priest was merely a visitor to such villages as this, an outsider who held mass, performed marriage ceremonies, baptized infants and collected hard-earned pesos. "He had never come more than once or twice a year anyway and this time his mule was ill."

There are exceptions, of course, to this indifference. They probably became the rule in that bloc of western states where the hacienda system most thoroughly stamped out communal village life during the Díaz epoch. In those pueblos which held onto their land or which have regained it the priest did not leave even a gap when he passed out of the picture.

Anita Brenner tells of attending a fiesta on a plateau hacienda. It wasn't much of a success, and she asked the *hacendado* where all the peons were, why they had not come. "Oh," he answered, "they've left religion at present. Now they are going into agrarianism."

An organization of Catholic laymen announced a boycott of luxuries, in order to "paralyze the social and economic life of the nation" and thus force the government to yield. Ve-

hicles, electric current, lotteries, theaters, were black-listed. With the mass of Mexicans subsisting on corn and beans and wearing *huaraches* or going barefooted! Needless to say, the boycott was ineffectual.

A more disturbing situation, though one which need not have reached such proportions, was created by armed rebels who rode through various parts of the country—through the west particularly, Colima, Jalisco and Michoacán—burning government buildings and schools and committing every form of banditry. *¡Cristo Rey!* was their war cry: “Christ is King!” Some were led by priests. At the worst the Mexican hierarchy encouraged the *Cristeros*; at the least it never officially protested against their depredations.

The Church had, on paper, a labor program in opposition to that of the C.R.O.M. Its spirit was expounded by Archbishop Orozco y Jiménez in a pastoral:

“ . . . as all authority is derived from God, the Christian workman should sanctify and make sublime his obedience by serving God in the person of his bosses. In this way obedience is neither humiliating nor difficult. We do not serve the man; we serve God; and he who serves God will not remain unrewarded . . . Poor, love your humble state and your work; turn your gaze toward heaven; there is the true wealth. Only one thing I ask: of the rich, love; of the poor, resignation.”

The 1925 convention of the Regional Confederation of Labor had passed a resolution maintaining that “the Roman Apostolic Church” had been “the enemy of the nation” since the days of Hidalgo and condemning its continuous efforts to bring about foreign intervention. When fifty *Cristeros* raided Parras de la Fuente, Coahuila, in January 1927, a captured Labor leader, Rafael Delgado, was executed.

In March *Cristeros* attacked the Laredo–Mexico City train, killed the conductor and guard and rode away with one hundred thousand government pesos. Passengers were not molested on this occasion but they suffered with the guard

when the Guadalajara-Mexico City train was dynamited in April. From fifty-four to one hundred people, including women and twenty children, lost their lives. Some were shot, some bayoneted, some burned alive when the rebels, with pictures of the Virgin sewed to their hats, poured kerosene on the cars and set fire to them. Survivors were found wandering through the sagebrush between La Barca and Ocotlán, raving mad. One man was carrying the burnt corpse of his baby. The clergy could not deny that priests were present at the holocaust, but asserted that they were merely chaplains. Escaped passengers testified that they had directed the assault. Calles dumped six bishops into Texas.

The *Cristeros* might have been suppressed long before had it not been for army officers who were in no hurry to lose such rich pickings. Wealthy Catholics were seized under the pretext that they were aiding the rebels. Sometimes they were shot; sometimes they were released after money had been extorted from them and their property had been confiscated. As a result the *Cristeros* gained new recruits, ferocious ones. The visitor to those western states may still have his blood curdled by tales of the excesses committed by both sides. General Jesús M. Ferreira, *jefe de operaciones* at Guadalajara, ordered six thousand square miles in northern Jalisco laid waste, its sixty thousand inhabitants, mostly peons, herded into concentration camps.

By July 1927 the *Cristero* cause was lost, but Mexico was shot through with the poison engendered by the conflict. The assassination of Obregón was clearly the act of an individual fanatic, for which not even the Church could be blamed, but it gave rise to all sorts of wild rumors, one charging Calles with connivance at the crime. Although he was as strong as ever it behooved him to demonstrate that his hands were clean. In his address to congress at its opening on September first, 1928, he announced in no uncertain terms his intention of retiring from the political field at the end of his term. "For the first time in our history," he said, "we find ourselves

without any *caudillo*. Let us direct the nation along the path of real institutional life, so that we may pass, once and for all, from a historical condition of a 'one-man' country to a nation of institutions and laws. . . ."

As provisional president congress chose Emilio Portes Gil, former governor of Tamaulipas, an *Obregonista* who was at the same time acceptable to the Calles clique. The good offices of Ambassador Morrow were largely responsible for the ensuing truce with the Church. Portes Gil promised the exiled bishops that, if the priests registered in due form, the government would not attempt to deprive the Church of its spiritual autonomy; also that religious instruction would be permitted within church buildings, although not in primary schools.

On the surface a *modus vivendi* seemed to have been reached, but the constitution still gave state legislatures the right to determine the number of ministers needed by each creed in each locality. The Catholic clergy fared worst in Tabasco, domain of Tomás Garrido Canabal, organizer of the anticlerical Red Shirts and of labor unions called Leagues of Resistance as in Yucatán, rabid prohibition advocate and father of one child named Lucifer and of another named Lenin. There a law forbade any priest to enter the state unless he were legally married. Other legislatures passed restrictions in 1931 and 1932, until by 1933 only one hundred and ninety-seven priests were allowed to officiate in the entire nation—an average of one for more than eighty thousand persons. For once the Church had reason to cry persecution.

Calles had made it his scapegoat. Having completed his turn to the right, he thought it wise nevertheless to have one policy to which he could call attention as proof that the government was carrying forward the program of the Revolution.

Calles was now *jefe máximo*, supreme chief, of the Revolution and, through his control of the machinery of the National Revolutionary party, arbiter of Mexico's destinies. Every important political group in the country had been

co-ordinated into the P.N.R. since its formation in 1929. The rank and file of the *Agraristas* were inside, their former leader, Soto y Gama, out in the cold. The power of Morones and the C.R.O.M., built up by violence, had been destroyed by violence. Calles had dictated the party's choice of colorless Pascual Ortiz Rubio of Michoacán as successor to Portes Gil. When Gonzalo Escobar led a pre-election revolt Calles took charge of the War Department long enough to drive him into exile, then went back to his mansion in Cuernavaca on what had come to be called the Street of the Forty Thieves. José Vasconcelos had gone off to the United States in a huff after receiving only a handful of votes as opposition candidate. In September 1932 Calles had turned Ortiz Rubio out of the National Palace and had put in his place Abelardo Rodríguez, wealthy gambling house owner of Lower California. The Fascist Gold Shirts, backed by *Callistas*, were mauling communists and obtaining a measure of support from Mexican retail merchants of the capital in their attempt to stir up anti-Semitism in a country which did not have more than fifteen thousand Jews, all told.

At the same time, however, young men, aroused to the need of saving the Revolution before it was too late, were strengthening the left wing of the P.N.R. All had been watching the Russian experiment and a number believed that, while communism was not practicable in Mexico, collectivism was. Labor had a leader far removed from Morones in scholarly intense Vicente Lombardo Toledano, son of a copper magnate of the state of Puebla, who had lost most of his fortune at the collapse of the Díaz regime. Although he had first attracted attention as the disciple of Antonio Caso, Bergsonian and head of the school of philosophy in the National University, Lombardo Toledano was growing more interested in labor problems and was finding the idealist philosophy untenable when Vasconcelos named him director of the National Preparatory School. Soon he was in the C.R.O.M., challenging the domination of Morones. In 1931 he broke



with the latter and the next year organized a number of labor unions into a General Confederation of Workers and Peasants, which became the nucleus of the Confederation of Mexican Workers, the C.T.M., functioning, unlike the C.R.O.M., on a basis of industrial unionism. Meanwhile Lombardo Tolezano had been moving, together with many young Mexican intellectuals, toward Comtism and then toward Marxism. In 1932 he charged Antonio Caso publicly with having gone from positivism to intellectualism to intuitionism to religious metaphysics and, "as an inevitable consequence of this philosophical and scientific involution, from the Christian concept of life to the political doctrine of Fascism."

Another able young scholar, Narciso Bassols, translator of Marxist works, was appointed minister of education during the presidency of Rodríguez. Even the support of the "Country Club President" could not keep him in office when he announced his intention of enforcing a constitutional amendment of 1934 providing for "socialist education" in all Mexican schools. The word "socialist" had little meaning here. Teachers were merely to combat clericalism by inculcating a scientific view of life in their pupils. The text prescribed was a translation of a standard work on physiology in use in schools of the United States. Bassols dramatically called the course "Sexual Education," and the uproar can still be heard. Priests and agitators warned Catholic families that if their children were sent to school they would be given instruction, not only in atheism, but in sexual intercourse. Archbishop Leopoldo Ruiz y Flores and Bishop José de Jesús Manrique y Zárate published "messages of protest," in which they made remarks that Attorney General Portes Gil held to be violations of the constitution and of the penal code. They escaped arrest by hurrying to the United States. Eighteen rural school-teachers were murdered, many more were mutilated. Attacks on teachers have never ceased in country districts. In 1937 they were made members of the Rural Defense Corps and authorized to carry arms if they believed themselves to be in

danger. In July 1938 the Union of Educational Workers told President Lázaro Cárdenas that twenty-five of their members had been killed since the first of the year.

Lázaro Cárdenas is a native of the little pueblo of Jiquilpan in Michoacán. By Mexican standards he did not have an exceptionally hard start in life. Jiquilpan was an ordinary adobe village, with no regular school, no physician, no decent water supply, no sewers. There were eight children in the Cárdenas del Río family, but there was also a bit of rocky land on which to raise corn. "Serious" is the word used to describe Cárdenas even before his father died, leaving him, at the age of twelve, to support the family on the fifty centavos a day which he earned as printer's devil. He was fifteen when he enlisted in the *Maderista* cause. He rose rapidly in the army, serving under Carranza against Huerta, under Calles against Carranza, as governor and military commandant of Michoacán. Loyal to the government during the De la Huerta conflict, he was wounded and captured in an engagement with dapper Enrique Estrada near Ocotlán. The army never became his world, however. He remained *un hijo del pueblo*.

From 1925 to 1928 Cárdenas was *jefe de operaciones* in the Huasteca, where he saw the workings of the foreign oil industry from the inside during the transition from the wild-cat stage to one of regulation. He didn't like what he saw. I notice that Ernest Gruening, writing at this period when Cárdenas was not a political figure, mentions as one of the few exceptions to the rule of corruption among the military "Lázaro Cárdenas, modest and unassuming, who quietly helps the schoolteachers and every civic project in his *jefatura*." (Mr Gruening also singles out Juan Andreu Almazán, "excellent soldier and cultured gentleman." General Almazán, later zone commander in Nuevo León, directed the building of the "military city" at Monterrey by soldiers as a project in the government's effort to "civilize" the army by "strengthening the unity between workers and soldiers.")

In traditional style General Cárdenas went into the presi-

dent's chair from the Ministry of War. Calles named him candidate of the P.N.R. as a concession to the left wing. General Saturnino Cedillo, agrarian leader who had become feudal ruler of the state of San Luis Potosí and champion of the extreme right, brought the military into line behind Cárdenas, thinking that as a good army man he would stand against the wealthy civilian group that surrounded Calles. Although his election was assured Cárdenas campaigned over nearly eighteen thousand miles, traveling by train, by automobile, by plane, on horseback.

"The main road of the new phase of the Revolution is the march of Mexico toward socialism," he said in his speeches, "a movement which departs equally from the anachronistic norms of classical liberalism and from those which are proper to communism that is undergoing an experiment in Soviet Russia. It departs from individualist liberalism, because this system cannot give rise to anything but the exploitation of man by man, to the unrestrained absorption of natural resources and to individual egoisms. It departs from state communism, because our people are not the kind to adopt a system which deprives them of the full enjoyment of their efforts, nor do they want to substitute the individual boss with the boss state."

When Cárdenas was elected over Antonio Villareal, Adalberto Tejeda and Hernán Laborde, candidates of the Anti-Re-election, Leftist Socialist and Communist parties respectively, he probably knew Mexico better than any other Mexican, certainly better than any president before him. For the first time a chief executive could rightfully lay claim to an election by popular vote.

As soon as Cárdenas went into office on December 1, 1934, Calles saw that he had mistaken his man. It was no figurehead who closed the Foreign Club, Agua Caliente and other illegal gambling places, most of them owned by *Callistas*; who pushed forward the agrarian program; who expressed sympathy with strikers. From Cuernavaca "the old man" rapped out a

warning: Remember what happened to Ortiz Rubio when he tried to assert himself. Cárdenas dismissed the cabinet with which Calles had provided him and—assisted by Portes Gil, who became president of the P.N.R.—formed one of his own, headed by Francisco Múgica. This being no time for a thorough house cleaning, General Cedillo was made minister of agriculture, replacing Garrido Canabal.

The latter's Red Shirts had spread over the republic, apparently trying to goad Catholics into rebellion so that President Cárdenas would have to call on General Calles for help. In the summer of 1935 they clashed with worshipers leaving a church in the suburb of Tacubaya, killing five. Cárdenas had their headquarters raided, and many of them returned with their chief to Tabasco which, like San Luis Potosí, was well-nigh independent of the rest of Mexico. When Tabascan students of the National University went down to their state capital to demonstrate against Garrido Canabal, Red Shirts met them with machine-gun fire. Government troops intervened and Cárdenas sent Garrido Canabal on an agricultural mission to Puerto Rico. A telegram caught up with him in Guatemala, informing him that the commission had been disbanded and that he need not return to Mexico.

Calles issued statements attacking Cárdenas, calling for the formation of "conservative" labor unions, appealing to the middle class to join them against the "radicals." In April 1936 he and Luis I. Morones were quietly deported. "I was exiled because I opposed attempts to implant a dictatorship of the proletariat," barked Calles to the press as he landed at the Brownsville, Texas, airport, a copy of Hitler's *Mein Kampf* (Spanish edition) under his arm. "At least I am now in a country where people respect me."

For once in its history Mexico had had a bloodless revolution.

By a special amnesty law Calles has been given permission to return to Mexico, but to date he has not taken advantage

of it. His mansion in Cuernavaca is leased to a citizen of the United States. His Mexico City home is a tourist hotel, where his son Rodolfo and his wife are charming to visiting capitalists. His Santa Bárbara hacienda, on the Puebla highway, is being made into an agricultural experiment station. Calles grows old out there in California. Perhaps he has been thinking of Santa Anna's last days.

In the fall of 1936 Portes Gil took a hint from above and retired from the presidency of the P.N.R. to private law practice. Now the party has been reorganized as the Party of the Mexican Revolution, representing workers, peasants and army. Its head, Luis I. Rodríguez, is a former private secretary of Lázaro Cárdenas.

In the summer of 1937 Saturnino Cedillo, the mainstay of the Gold Shirts, left the cabinet and returned to San Luis Potosí, where it is generally believed that he had aid from Germany in equipping his private army. A revolt, alleged by the government to have been supported by the oil companies, was nipped in the bud. Cedillo took to the hills and in January 1939 was reported slain in a battle with federal troops.

Cedillo had been known as a paladin of the Church. Constitutional provisions applying to the clergy had gone unenforced in San Luis Potosí, and the state had become a retreat for priests and nuns. Yet when it came to a showdown between Cedillo and Cárdenas, the Church stood by the president.

In 1936 Cardenas had announced from Jalisco, clerical stronghold, that he did not consider it the concern of the government to undertake antireligious campaigns. "The duty of a revolutionary administration like the present consists in doing all that may be necessary to carry out the program of the Revolution, the fundamental aspects of which are social and economic in character," he said. "Action by organized masses in the fight against fanaticism and in support of the Socialist school is the best safeguard for the lives

of their own members, for that of the teachers of their children, and for the social, economic and spiritual emancipation of the people."

Michoacán, Cárdenas' home state, furnished Mexico with her new archbishop, Luis M. Martínez. If this was a coincidence it was a happy one, for to all appearances the two have reached an understanding. In January 1938 Catholics heard these words from their archbishop:

"In truth, it is worth while to sacrifice our own ideals, excellent as we deem them, in order to maintain unity with our brethren around the ideas which seem inferior to ours, but which will make us all one; it is worth while to desist from our aims, holy though they may be, in order that we may join our hearts to those of our brothers, for, according to Saint Thomas, it is charity for man to want to realize the will of his fellow man as if it were his own, and it is a greater good to achieve concord and harmony among our brothers than to achieve realization of the highest ideas and the holiest aims."

1938 was declared by the Church a "holy year" in observance of the four hundredth anniversary of the apparition of the Virgin of Guadalupe, and celebrations were all the more elaborate for having been postponed seven years. While they were going on, it is true, the government quietly nationalized ten real-estate properties for infringement of the church laws or as belonging to the clergy under the names of laymen. Most of the anticlerical laws remain on the statute books, although enforcement of them has become considerably milder. On the church side, the admonition to organize Catholic action, contained in a pastoral letter of 1935, has not been forgotten. The Cárdenas administration, alone of all the governments of the Americas, aided the Spanish Loyalists. Catholic support went to Franco and there was open rejoicing at his victory—all the while priests must have been pondering the fate of the Christian religion in Nazi Germany.

No, the church question isn't settled in Mexico, but the

stand taken by the clergy in the Cedillo affair—and in another of more significance—is highly encouraging to those who believe that President Cárdenas is on the right tack.

In May 1937 rising costs of living in the oil fields, where even corn and beans have to be imported due to the destruction of agriculture, caused a strike of the seventeen thousand workers. The next month the men agreed to resume work on condition that the Labor Board (the commission on arbitration and conciliation) conduct an "economic investigation" of the companies, as prescribed by law in such cases, and pass on their ability to pay and on the merits of the workers' demands. The board found that the companies had much lower costs, per production unit, in Mexico than in the United States. The investment required was lower, as were royalties, rentals and taxes. Nominal wages of oil workers were but 30.8 per cent of those paid in the United States, the board reported, and, while the real wages of workers in this industry in the United States had increased 8.75 per cent between 1934 and 1937, corresponding Mexican wages had decreased almost 23 per cent. It was further asserted in the report that oil companies in the United States had averaged a profit of 1.44 per cent in 1935, while companies in Mexico had made 17.82 per cent during that year. The board ordered wage increases and welfare benefits totaling 26,329,393 pesos and the granting to the workers of certain rights of participation in management.

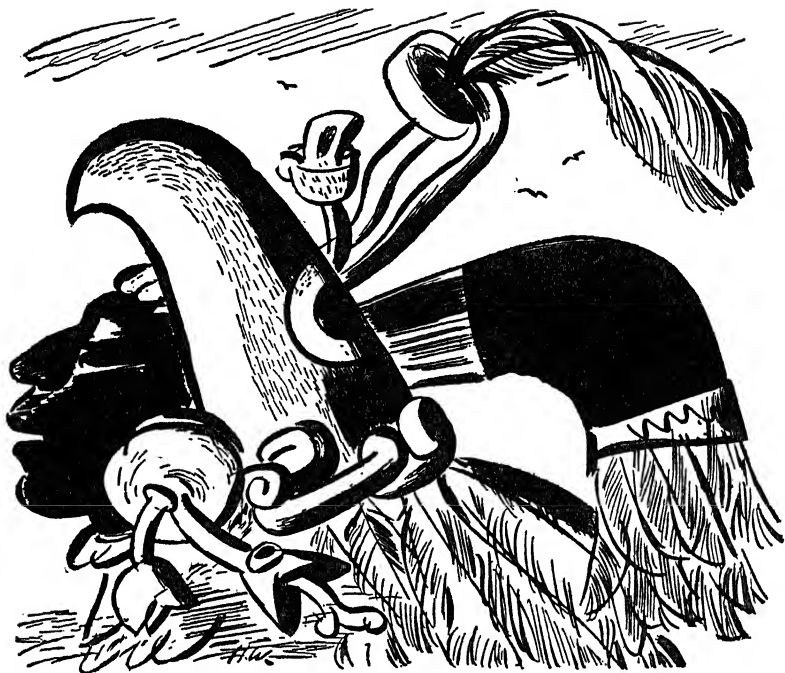
The companies denounced the report as "clearly prejudiced and impassioned" and brought forward figures of their own, showing a profit for 1935 of only 7.5 per cent. They claimed that the administrative features of the award would give the labor syndicates too much voice in the management and that the increases in wages ordered would cost them forty-one million pesos. They offered to increase wages by twenty-one million pesos, asserting that they would leave Mexico rather than obey the board's ruling as it stood. They appealed against the legality of the decision to the Mexican supreme

court, and lost. On March 8, 1938, the final date set by the Labor Board for compliance, they had not given in, although the government had guaranteed that the cost to them of the wage increases would not exceed twenty-six million pesos. The government gave the officials of the companies ten days' grace. On the last day they agreed to the wage increases but still refused to abide by the rest of the decision. They were too late, Cárdenas declared. The expropriation act had been drawn and signed.

"Independence . . . 1810-1938," proclaimed an editorial in the next day's *El Nacional*. "Revolutionary Mexico takes the first step into what until yesterday was 'no man's land' because it was her own land."

During the mammoth demonstration in the Zócalo in support of Cárdenas' action the bells of the cathedral rang as loudly as they had the day Bazaine's French Legion tramped in.





## CHAPTER XX

# The Cave God of Chalma

I NEVER thought about it before, but I am moved to apologize when I say that I have been to a fiesta. I suppose the truth is that I have always felt more than a little reluctant to intrude upon what is, after all, another man's most intimate concern. A fiesta is not a show put on for the benefit of tourists. For all its "county-fair" accessories, it is primarily a manifestation of religious feeling. Not that the participants object to the presence of foreigners, so long as these are not

open in their ridicule, but I cannot help wondering what would happen if a party of Mexicans were to barge into a church in the United States, during a service or during a pie supper, and start subjecting everything and everybody to their scrutiny.

Years ago I took a group to a fiesta at the Sacro Monte of Amecameca, where immaculate snow almost overhead and a wind like an avalanche blast ought in themselves to put a little awe into the most rattlebrained. An Indian woman was ascending the stone stairway on her knees, probably to pray before *El Santo Entierro* or the image of the Virgin for the recovery of a sick child. I didn't see her face but I thought of Francisco Goitia's remark about his charcoal drawing, Women at the Battle of Ocotlán: "Their pain can be felt in the lines of their garments."

"Tell her to look up!" one of my schoolteachers called to me from the last Station of the Cross, where she stood adjusting her movie camera.

I felt pretty sure I should not run across the likes of that lady at Chalma. Frances Toor, who knows all about these things, had written in her guidebook: "The way is hard, and there are no accommodations, so, unspoiled by city people, the festivals are the most beautiful in the republic." Frances Toor, consulted in person, described the road in more forceful language and looked doubtfully at our *Fordecito*. "Oh well," she said, "past Ocuilan you'll be walking or riding horseback anyway."

The way was too hard for Franciscans and Dominicans, was the boast of the friars of St Augustine, who reached Ocuilan in 1533. Once there, however, they found their work of conversion balked by some "malignant" influence. Not only the Ocuiltecos but Indians of the whole region kept going with offerings of fruit, flowers and copal incense to a canyon with a name that sounded like Chalma. In a cavern there, the Augustinians learned, was an image of Oztocteotl, God of the Caves. In 1539 two members of the order took

their crucifixes in hand and went to exorcise the demon. They found the canyon, with Indians bathing in a tumbling river and in a pool fed by a sacred spring. They found the cave and were struck with horror as they looked at the stone idol and at the altar, from which blood dripped onto flowers. There are several stories as to what followed. According to the most widely disseminated one, Fray Nicolás de Perea was enough of a linguist to preach a fiery sermon then and there. It moved some but by no means all of Oztocotl's worshipers, so the Spaniards returned to Ocuilan, praying that the word might do its work.

Three days later Fray Nicolás was back at Chalma. He found the idol broken to pieces on the floor of the grotto and in its place a life-sized image of Christ crucified. The flowers remained, covering the altar now, but the place had been cleansed and the stench of blood had given way to a holy fragrance. Obviously the crucifix had erected itself and cast down the idol. Furthermore all those familiars of the demon which once had infested the canyon had fled: wild beasts, serpents, scorpions, spiders, wasps. The Indians were swept into the fold by another "wave of apostolic piety," and the Augustinians, with this miracle of their own, could hold up their heads when the proud Franciscans spoke of the grace accorded their order by the Virgin's appearance at Tepeyac.

The entrance to the cave was enlarged and a painting of St Michael hung over the altar. In the latter part of the sixteenth century a poor shoemaker of Jalapa, Bartolomé de Jesús María, made a pilgrimage to Chalma. He stayed to become a friar and in time guardian of the shrine. Immediately below the cave he built a convent with cloisters and cells to shelter pilgrims, who were coming in ever greater numbers. Many miracles were recorded during the lifetime of Fray Bartolomé. Once while at prayer he was lifted into the air until only his feet touched the ground. "The soft hand of God eased his fall so that he suffered no harm, though the

sleeve of his habit was torn." After his death one blow of a machete opened a grave for him in the hard soil in front of the altar.

In 1683 the grotto was abandoned and the image of Our Lord of Chalma was carried with great ceremony down to the church which had been constructed for it on the valley floor. A century later Charles III of Spain placed the shrine under his royal protection, bestowing upon it the title of Convento Real y Santuario de Nuestro Señor Jesús Cristo y San Miguel de las Cuevas de Chalma.

While little is known of the original cult of Oztocoteotl, there is evidence that he had a mate in that cave of his: Tlazolteotl, who besides her primary function in connection with maize was a goddess of the filth of the fertile earth and of concupiscence. So it is interesting to find Our Lord of Chalma apparently specializing in an unusual sort of miracle. In the days of Fray Bartolomé an unmarried pair resolved to give up their way of life the instant they stepped inside the cave. In more recent years a husband, surprising his wife and her lover in the woods, set upon them with a machete. The woman called on Our Lord of Chalma. He responded instantly, turning her paramour into an altar and himself appearing upon it. The husband dropped his weapon and knelt with his contrite wife before the Christ. . . .

One might fill a book—books have been filled—with similar miracles.

As the fame of Chalma spread the friars had to eliminate some of the crush by specifying the days on which various regions were to make their pilgrimages. The first Friday in Lent and the Fiesta del Espíritu Santo in May draw the largest crowds, as many as twenty thousand at a time, it is estimated. Pilgrims from the states of Mexico, Guerrero, Morelos, Puebla and Tlaxcala attend on the first Friday, the anniversary of the church's dedication. The May fiesta, commemorating the original miracle in the cave, is for the faithful of Mexico City. Twelfth Night is set aside for worshipers from Milpa

Alta; Candlemas for those from distant Tehuantepec. The reservation of these dates is not exclusive, however. A band of Tlaxcalans arrived during our visit on August 28, which is St Augustine's day and the fiesta of Xochimilco.

We saw no pilgrims on the long dirt road which leads up and down the cobbled streets of Ocoyoacac, past the plaza of Tianguistengo, to Ocuilan and the cliffs above the Chalma River. Most pilgrims go on foot, by mountain trails. Rolling meadowy country this is at the start, with ponds tucked away every few miles and with wheat in evidence as well as the *milpas* without which no landscape is to my eyes truly Mexican. Magueyes rapidly thin out and flowers have possession of the grass: white golden-hearted nymphaeas, salvias, violet-colored *amapolitas*, white poppies called *chicalotes* and tall red "holy thistles," *cardos santos*. As long as I didn't look at El Nevado de Toluca towering on the right, its old crater faintly etched by snow, I was reminded of parts of the Ozarks of Missouri and Arkansas. *La tierra templada*.

When we stopped at Tianguistengo two of our party strolled over to look at the arch of cornstalks and husks decorating the entrance to the atrium of the church. A group of men gathered about them, eager to talk of Chalma. They expressed grave doubts as to whether there would be a fiesta on the day of San Agustín. *Los de Xochimilco* very likely would not come. But next month, on the day of San Miguel, there would be a large fiesta. . . .

Two of us had gone into the grocery across the street, to sample the blackberry cordial for which near-by Tenango is famous. The proprietress, a truthful soul, assured us that "those of Xochimilco" were already at Chalma. But they would hold such a small fiesta. Why did we not come back in September, on the day of San Miguel? There would be such crowds!

Fiestas have a way of becoming will-o'-the-wisps as one approaches them and, had Chalma not been such an important shrine, I should have been preparing myself for disappoint-

ment as we drove on. In this case I suspect some regional rivalry was at work. St Michael's day, September 29, and New Year's are not on the calendar of regular fiestas at the sanctuary, so the neighboring villages, rather crowded out at other times, have appropriated them as their own. While I was at Chalma a dozen men, who seemed at home in the place, must have handed me posters announcing: *Entusiastas y solemnes fiestas que se celebrarán en el Santuario de Chalma, el día 29 de septiembre, en honor del Arcángel San Miguel.*

Ocuilan, with its thatched roofs, belongs to *la tierra caliente*. There the road ends and I am sure that I shall not live to see the day when engineers make an assault on the mountains beyond. People who have made the trip are about equally divided as to whether it is wiser to go ahead on foot or on horseback. I can take no part in the discussion. When we had parked *el Fordecito* in a barnyard and made known our need of mounts, we learned that only three horses were available. All the rest had gone to Chalma. There was a burro. With a gallantry born of the *zarzamora*, I soon decided, I elected to take the burro. His name? His name was El Golondrino.

The Swallow got me to Chalma in about three hours, over the trail which the Augustinians must have followed. It is worn deep, so old with pilgrimages that a hundred years more will probably make no perceptible change in it. Stepping stones like saucers are regularly spaced in the streams that slit the mountainsides on their rush to the river. I looked into the clear water when El Golondrino stopped to drink. My eyes fell on a tooth, a stone arrowhead, a factory-made button. Singular things hang on trees, among fresh and withered wreaths: twisted hanks of hair and dried placentas, ex-votos of thankful mothers. Fray Nicolás saw like offerings in 1539. We passed several dwellings, roofed with banana leaves, invariably clean. Daisies bordered the stone walls, roses climbed over them, geraniums bloomed in tin buckets about the low entrances, hibiscus plants stood in the swept yards.

Men, women, bright-eyed children showed no interest in me, all having seen stranger sights than this *americano* with gritted teeth who kept sliding backward off his improvised saddle of sarapes, but there was always an exchange of greetings with my *arriero*.

"*Adiós.*"

"*Adiós.*" Those are the conventional courtesies of the road in Mexico and no "correct" person will omit them.

As we followed the course of the Chalma River my *arriero* pointed out beasts, birds and a turtle sculptured high on the face of the palisades opposite. "*Cosas de los antiguos,*" he told me over the water's roar. "Things of the ancient ones." Deep in this gorge an electric power line is not a link with cities but a weird Martian procession—or further handiwork of Our Lord of Chalma. Twice a godparent, accompanying a child's real parents to the shrine for the christening, has slept on the family *petate*. Our Lord of Chalma was quick to punish such promiscuity. He turned a man and a woman into huge rocks, whose eyes stare at you as you pass. He turned another guilty pair into a tree and a stone. The woman is a tree beside the trail, long moss her hair, a mark on the trunk her navel. The man is one of the stones underfoot, nobody knows which one. He will win pardon if he can finish his pilgrimage, so the kindhearted person gives each stone a kick in the hope of helping the unfortunate soul toward the sanctuary.

Only once was I near a serious mishap, when El Golondrino shied as we rounded a fern-feathered bank and scared a pair of *zopilotes* from their feast on the carcass of a brother of his. A wing struck a hibiscus, scattering blood-red petals in time to save my jolted stomach. . . .

"*¡Arre, burro!*"

We were pitching obliquely down a mountainside. Over an inclined stone parapet I could see wooden crosses set upon reddish cliffs that rose out of a green valley. The valley was giving forth music and the popping of firecrackers. A rocket

soared and exploded like a clap of thunder from the rain clouds which our horsemen had been racing but which El Golondrino and I had accepted fatalistically and without loss of decorum.

"¿Chalma?" I admit I was thrilled.

"Sí, señor. ¡Arre, burro!"

I had read how exquisite melodies used to issue from the cave during Fray Bartolomé's prayers. But this familiar music had no heavenly source. As the trail twisted back on itself and Chalma lay before me, I recognized the tune, last heard in the Mexico City movie theater where I had had to stand in line for an hour in order to see *Blancanieves y Los Siete Enanos*. In front of this temple in the wilderness—unmistakably referred to in the Bible, Augustinians said—a brass band from Malinalco was playing "Heigh-ho!" the song of Walt Disney's dwarfs.

Chalma is faith, more upsetting to the rationalist than the hill of Tepeyac or the Sacro Monte, which after all are "sights" near populous centers. Chalma cannot be called even a village. I doubt whether fifteen families live there. On the physical plane there is nothing but a narrow cobbled lane which winds between a row of booths backed against the cliff and a row of stone houses overlooking the river and which ends at the paved atrium of church and convent.

Having sent El Golondrino and the horses to graze on the hillside, beyond two open-fronted tents where games of chance were in progress, we walked up and over the hump of the lane, stepping with care. One is told that it is impossible to get anything to eat at Chalma. While I saw little that Prendes' or Butch's Manhattan would have served, food there was: in a small *fonda* or two, in booths, underfoot. Meat sizzled and *tortillas* scorched over charcoal fires built on the cobblestones. Under awnings supported by tripods pre-Columbian fashion, women offered spectacular bread from Tecomanla, village of bakers. Most of the huge, oddly shaped



loaves had icing in purple and magenta, St Augustine's colors.

I stopped at a six-foot-by-two grocery for a bottle of beer *al tiempo*, of course, since ice will be one of the last things carried through those mountains. Immediately my *arriero* was at my side. The money which I had given him for a drink had been spent on fodder for El Golondrino. The poor little beast was so tired from having had me on his back all afternoon.

While we stood there drinking Toluca beer the trade was chiefly in salt, done up in paper screws that sold for five centavos. The proprietors of most of these stalls are *mestizos* who come from Tianguistengo, Malinalco, even Toluca for the fiestas. They act bored and supercilious, and I wouldn't give a *tostón* for the reverence of all of them for the shrine of Chalma.

Veneration is on the cobblestones. Some pilgrims from Xochimilco went by, with vases of white tuberose, calla lilies and carnations from the *chinampas* three days' journey away. "¡Qué flores tan bonitas para el señor!" exclaimed the old Indian woman who crouched by a neat pile of fiber baskets and bags stamped *Recuerdo de Chalma* in magenta and purple. "What beautiful flowers for the lord!" "¡Ay, qué bonito!" echoed the man in white *calzones* and *camisa* who was awaiting his turn in the straight-backed deal chair where a barber in overalls was working against the fading light. By the gender of the adjective and by the direction of his gaze, he meant the *cohete* which had just burst into red and green fire over the river. Skyrockets and flowers: both are acceptable to Our Lord of Chalma.

The liveliest business was being done at the entrance to the atrium, where were displayed pictures of the sacred image, aluminum medallions, rosaries of carved wood and glass, *alabanzas* printed on pink and green sheets like *corridos* or in booklets. Candles hung in long rows, the majority cheap but many as tall as I and some the like of which I never saw

gracing a dinner table in the United States. Candles render unremitting service to *Nuestro Señor de Chalma*. After a fiesta the drippings of wax are collected from the floor and sold to the candlemakers.

The atrium, perhaps a quarter of an acre in extent, was the focus of activity. There the rival bands held forth: the intrusive brass one and a pair of Xochimilcans with drum and *chirimía*. The latter is a small flageolet, carved out of wood, which has changed but little since the day when Alvarado cut the musicians to pieces in the patio of Huitzilopochtli's *teocalli*. It has a penetrating sound, like a nasal human wail. On one side of the atrium, by the stairs which lead to the first floor of the convent, a photographer was being kept busy. You mounted a wooden pony and posed against a backdrop of a formal garden. If you wished you might wear a sombrero and cock a wooden pistol. A father and mother counted their centavos and swung their scoured and beribboned little girl into the saddle. As the camera clicked she buried her face on the father's shoulder. In the atrium and on the roof of the church men set off the fireworks—not in a frolicking Fourth of July manner, but gravely and at regular intervals, like the responses to the catechism.

Visitors have found the church disappointing. Whereas the cathedral at Taxco is criticized for having towers too large for its façade, the pink belfries of Our Lord of Chalma's temple have been called too small for the white front and the large dome. I thought the whole edifice beautiful, fittingly dwarfed by cliffs against which it would take towers twice as high as Taxco's to make an impression. If there is serious detracting from the church's majesty I should say the fault lay in general with the convent, satisfying as this is in itself with its four tiers of arches built into the mountain, and in particular with lines of washing slung from pillar to pillar. Yet those clean clothes hung out to dry for the morrow's wear may be more significant than Spanish architecture and Catholic mass.

It was the hour of vespers, and I penetrated into the packed church only far enough to get a glimpse of the four-centuries-old crucifix in a glass case on an altar worked in gold leaf and banked with flowers. Our Lord of Chalma looks as dark as any of his worshippers.

In a crypt under that altar Oztocoteotl's idol is said to be buried. Indians have been observed peering through the heavy iron grille which guards the subterranean vault, supposedly trying to see "the true Lord of Chalma." Silver coins have been tossed inside. After a mass in 1926 an old Indian told a visitor that "the real saint is buried under the altar—the one hanging on the cross is a pilgrim." On the other hand, Erna Fergusson, attending the fiesta of San Agustín in 1933, noticed "nothing to indicate any hidden, but conscious, pagan cult, though many primitive customs persist through habit or inertia."

I spent little time in the church itself, which was crowded almost to its capacity whenever I went to the door. But I knew that it was worship of nature in some of her aspects that drew those early Mexicans to this remote valley. Since the valley—the soil, the vegetation, the river—has not been changed, it seemed to follow that some of the meaning of Chalma might be found out of doors as well as in the suffocating interior of the shrine.

For repertorial purposes I tried to reduce that fiesta to a schedule of events. Like many a tourist determined not to miss anything, I had to give it up as hopeless. The best I can do is to give the printed program for St Michael's day, which follows the same general plan as that for St Augustine's and which, I understand, varies little from year to year.

"At 4 A.M. on the twenty-eighth, the day before the fiesta, there will be a salvo of skyrockets, music and chimes; mass in the Cave of San Miguel; and at 8 and at 10 A.M. the religious organizations will make their entries.

"At 6 P.M. solemn practice of matins.

"On the twenty-ninth at 9 A.M. there will be solemn mass, exposition of the Holy Sacrament and a sermon.

"At 4 P.M., recitation of the rosary, a procession with the Holy Sacrament, benediction and a reservation.

"Aside from these entirely religious acts, in order to lend greater splendor to the fiesta there will be music, lighting on the façades of the temple and atrium, adornment of the entrance and the procession which is commonly called *Vítor*.

"Besides all this the fiesta will end with a *Castillo*."

La Cueva de San Miguel is simply the church. Surprisingly, no one appears to have the slightest interest in the historic cave. It's just a hole in the valley wall. It will be noticed that no dances are scheduled. This may be in line with the government's policy to separate the indigenous dance and preserve it apart from the Church, or it may be due to the unreliability of the dancers. Although one hears of dozens of different *danzas* being performed in the atrium during the great fiestas none had been held at the time we left on the afternoon of St Augustine's day, and I found no assurance that there would be any later. I am sure the *Castillo* was some compensation, however, for it was a mighty one that I saw under construction: a framework as high as the church roof, which on the lighting of a fuse would become a deafening, blinding mass of rockets, Catherine wheels and balls of red and green and orange fire.

The Xochimilcans went the devotees of St Michael one better in the matter of fireworks, heralding the day of the fiesta with a four o'clock salvo. We had found lodging in a house: a supper of bread, fruit and the ever-dependable Mexican chocolate; *petates* and space to spread them on the stone floor of a room off the patio, a room containing a corn-crib, a table and chairs and a niche in which a candle burned before the image of the Virgin of Guadalupe throughout the night. Our possession of that floor was not undisputed, however, for Chalma stands in urgent need of another miracle,

directed against those minute familiars of the demon which were overlooked at the time of the first purification. It must have been midnight when I got up at last, to watch rockets flare and to listen to the tireless rise and fall of the *chirimía's* wail. I lay down, drew my sarape over me and the next moment, it seemed, the salvo had begun: fireworks, bells, brass band, *chirimía* and drum. . . .

The sun was not yet over the cliffs when I made my way down to the river, past a concrete pool into which a few *mestizo* youths in bathing suits were diving. On the smooth dark rocks lay piles of white cotton clothes. In the swift stream men were scrubbing themselves, postured and silent as idols as they poured the cold water from pottery bowls over their heads. Downstream a burro stood resignedly while his master curried him. Upstream an Indian baby who had yet to learn resignation was being held up by an older sister for a mother's inspection. His little bottom didn't pass muster and down he went.

The two Augustinians described a similar scene when they returned to Ocuilan four centuries ago. The outer man had to be free from dirt before Tlazolteotl would cleanse the inner. For this goddess, "Consumer of Filth," was the recipient of confessions and the dispenser of absolution, the punishment from which she gave immunity, being of this world, of course, not of the other. She would grant this to a man but once in his lifetime, too, so most Mexicans waited until extreme old age to confess, when temptation would no longer be so hard to resist.

Sahagún was naturally much interested in this subject. "When the penitent decided to confess," he writes, "he went to one of the priests who was a confessor and said to him: 'Sir, I should like to reach the all-powerful god who is the protector of all and whose name is Tezcatlipoca; I should like to tell my sins in secret.' Upon hearing this, the priest said to him: 'You are welcome, my son, for what you say you want to do is for your good.'" There followed a consultation of

the *tonalamatl* and the choice of a propitious day. "When the day arrived on which he had been commanded to return the penitent bought a new *petate* and white incense, which they call *copalli*, and wood for the fire in which the *copalli* was to be burned . . . Arrived before the priest, he carefully swept the place where the new *petate* was to be spread, in order that the confessor might rest upon it. Then the priest lighted the fire and threw the copal into the fire and spoke to the fire, saying to it: 'You, Lord, who are the father and mother of the gods, and the most ancient god, know that this, your servant, has come here, and come crying, and come with great sadness, and come with great grief, because he knows that he has erred, has slipped and stumbled and touched the filthiness of sin and grave crimes worthy of death, and for this reason he comes burdened with sorrow. Our very merciful Lord, since you are the protector and defender of all, receive in penitence, hear the anguish of this, your servant and vassal.'

"When this prayer was finished the priest turned to the penitent and spoke to him in this manner: 'Son, you have come into the presence of the god who is the helper and protector of all; you came to reveal to him your inner stench and corruption; you come to open to him the secrets of your heart, so see that you do not precipitate yourself into the abyss by telling a lie in the presence of our lord . . . Certain it is that you are before him although you are not worthy of seeing him, nor of being addressed by him, because he is invisible and impalpable; take care, then, how you come and in what spirit, do not hesitate to make your secrets known in his presence; review your life, tell your deeds just as you committed your excesses and offenses; pour out your iniquities in his presence, confide with sadness in our lord god, who is the favorer of all and has his arms open and ready to embrace you, and to bear you up: see that you omit nothing out of shame, nothing out of weakness.' "

Pilgrims to Chalma used to roll naked in hay and then set

fire to the sin-laden stuff. Now they come out of the river, put on spotless clothes, brush their hair and go up to the church to pour out their iniquities before the priest of another "invisible and impalpable" god. I know how skeptical of their conversion Father Sahagún would have been in the sixteenth century. I cannot think that he would be any less so today.

A big blue-and-white balloon drew me back to the atrium. When it had risen well above the towers it loosed a shower of firecrackers and everybody exclaimed: "*¡Qué bonito!*"

A like exclamation came from me when I looked inside the church. The altar was now set in a solid wall of white flowers. Tall white vases of tuberoses, chrysanthemums and carnations seemed its sole support, sweet peas its only binding. Clouds, just touched by candlelight, hung about the top, where rested baskets of what Mexicans call *nubes* and we baby's breath.

I felt a tremor go through the crowd behind me and turned to see it parting before the pilgrims from Tlaxcala. They must have been walking for a week. *Huaraches* and bare feet, *calzones* and printed cotton skirts, were covered with mud of three, perhaps four states. Some came on their knees, some with quickened steps. The lips of all were moving in prayer and they saw nothing but the doorway which was their goal, with its inscription: *Venid a mí todos los que estáis trabajados y encargados y los aliviaré.*

One man carried the pueblo's *santo* on his back, in a wooden case which would be opened and placed before the more powerful *santo* of Chalma. A wedge enclosed the image: handsome, splendidly built young Indians wearing hibiscus wreaths. They were a startling sight, and not until they had passed did I realize what I had instantly associated them with. Sahagún's description of those living personifications of Tezcatlipoca: "They had a large number of these youths set aside, chosen from among the finest of the prisoners of war, and great care was taken that they should be the cleverest and of the best disposition, without a blemish on

their bodies." This was the flower of some village's manhood, and just so would they have gone to the altar of Tezcatlipoca, breaking flutes. Now they went to a door that promised: "Come unto me, all ye who are weary and heavy laden."

One of our party came to get me then. We must see about returning to Mexico City. She had been away from newspaper offices for two days and felt so out of touch with what was going on in Mexico.





## CHAPTER XXI

# The Return of Quetzalcoatl

OAXACANS say that in order to reach heaven, which is their green capital, one must go through hell: the canyon of the Tomellín, which the narrow-gauge railway line traverses about halfway between Tehuacán and the City of Calabash Trees.

In view of Oaxaca's delights the metaphor isn't inexact, although the trip is by no means as "frightful" as pictured by Mr Aldous Huxley, who, gone sour in the Guatemalan jungles, looked back on the heat at Quiotepec, lowest point on the Puebla-Oaxaca line, as the worst he had experienced anywhere during his travels. I judge that Mr Huxley never rode in a day coach between Monterrey and Matamoros or, for that matter, between Monterrey and San Antonio, Texas. I have never followed his advice to pull down the shade and read Spinoza. In the first place, there are beauties about that landscape too rare to be missed. One may travel through Mexico and never see a maguey in flower until he reaches

the vicinity of Tepeaca, the old Segura de la Frontera, where Cortés first branded slaves in Mexico. There are pomegranates on the platform at Tehuacán, plums at Tecomavaca, and, as the train sinks into the hot lands, everything: bananas, mammees, mangoes, oranges, figs, papayas, chirimoyas, pine-apples. There are cacti that would startle the native of the Río Grande country, mammoth *órganos* and candelabra and *nopales*, with scarlet patches of feeding cochineals. Oaxaca is the home of many species of cacti: the woolly gray-green *chilito*, bearing a yellow flower in the center; the *viento*, with white or cream-colored blossoms striped with red, another of that genus with yellow wool and red flowers; epiphyllums with fragrant white and rose-colored flowers. A long-armed man could touch them from the train windows, I think, as well as the huge rattlesnakes that coil on the brown rocks as the sun declines. There are *casahuate* trees, with white trumpet-shaped flowers; orchids; vines with the coral-red *flores de San Diego* that Southerners in the United States call Montezuma's rose. . . .

Yes, I should look forward to boarding that early morning train at Puebla again even if I had to do so, as last time, without having had a cup of coffee. (Luckily, the volcanoes were sculptured out of purest nacre that morning.)

Then too, I have never found Mr Huxley's advice practicable because I have always chanced to sit by a blind which, as the Mexicans say, "does not wish to come down." Those blinds did not develop that obstinacy in June 1937, when the railways were nationalized, however, as I almost wasted breath in telling the citizen of the United States across from me who struggled with one while I was downing a breakfast of tamales, handed to me through the window at Tepeaca, and *agua de Tehuacán*, bought from the news butcher.

"Damn these Mexicans!" my fellow countryman said, sitting down, hitching up the knees of his Harris tweeds and going back to his *Saturday Evening Post*. "This is what comes of them trying to run the railroads by themselves."

A typical member of the American Colony, living in and off Mexico, contemptuous of everything Mexican. There was no Pullman on that train, otherwise he would never have lowered himself to ride in that coach. Much of the talk about the inefficiency with which the National Railways are being operated comes from his set. Some of it is part of a deliberate program to disparage the Cárdenas administration. I have traveled a number of miles on Mexican railroads before nationalization and after without noticing any difference between their present management and that when they were being operated for the benefit of foreign bondholders. Goodness knows, window shades stick on branch-line trains in the United States, but this fellow, getting off at Tehuacán, would tell his friends at the Garci Crespo—and listening tourists—what a mess Mexicans are making of the railroads, of the petroleum industry, of the mines, of agriculture. . . .

Tehuacán, terminus of the Pan American Highway at present, with swimming pools, golf links, tennis courts and bars in *art moderne*, has become an adjunct of the American Colony. "A bit of Miami." It now figures more largely in the social news than in the political. In 1933 it was the meeting place of the platform committee of the National Revolutionary party: Calles; Francisco Gaxiola, Jr., private secretary of President Abelardo Rodríguez; General Miguel M. Acosta, communications minister; Minister of National Economy Primo Villa Michel; and Juan de Dios Bojórquez, head of the Labor Department. Due to pressure from labor organizations and peasant federations and from such states as Vera Cruz, where social legislation had assumed its most radical aspect, the Calles platform finally became the Six-Year Plan, calling for state-directed economy. Adopted by the convention which nominated Lázaro Cárdenas, the plan was in effect during the last eleven months of the Abelardo Rodríguez administration, so that it entered its final year on January first, 1939.

By the time the train drew out of Tehuacán in the middle

of the morning, the seat opposite me had been taken up—"Con su permiso, señor"—by the overflow from the one across the aisle, where a Mexican family was making an all-day picnic out of the trip. By the time we reached the horseshoe curves that announce the beginning of the descent to the Tomellín, four-year-old Héctor had lurched against my knee, his father had apologized and invited me to share in a hamper of food, and I was admiring the snake cane which had been bought at Apizaco for *el abuelito* down in Oaxaca. A painted serpent twisting through red roses and green cacti: the "little grandfather" would lean on a cedar stick not essentially changed from the wooden snakes with which the priests of Tlaloc invoked rain before ever the Aztecs came to Anáhuac. It would probably have no esoteric significance for him, although there are Indians in the Valley of Tlacolula who believe that a snake—with wings—lives in the river at Mitla, controlling rainfall.

Héctor's father was on some kind of an agrarian commission, I learned. He had been up in Mexico City for the *Congreso de la Unificación Campesina*, at which the National Peasants' Confederation was organized, and for the opening of the national congress on September first, 1938, when President Cárdenas announced how he purposed to answer Secretary Hull's last note regarding farm properties which United States citizens had lost by expropriation:

"The view will be sustained that the agrarian reforms represent the most imperative and most transcendental means employed by Mexico to win social and economic stability . . . Believing that the common welfare must prevail over individual rights, Mexico could not subordinate application of the law to the possibilities of immediate payment."

In the course of our conversation that day the Oaxacan mentioned the old saying about hell and the Tomellín, and drew a further comparison between the heat there and the

struggle of the villages for their *ejidos*. The Tomellín, he said, quoting somebody's speech, represented the Díaz period, when the pueblos were most hard pressed. The train climbs slowly and with labor out of the canyon, sometimes descending again almost to the level of Quiotepec, sometimes being sidetracked, and not until Las Sedas is reached, at the top of the divide between the Tomellín and the Valley of Oaxaca, does one feel sure that there is going to be an end. At Las Sedas, concluded my friend, Lázaro Cárdenas took over the engine.

As President Cárdenas indicated in his address to congress, one of the main objectives of the Six-Year Plan is the satisfaction of all the agricultural needs of the rural population centers. In 1934, before he took office, an agrarian code was enacted which had been designed to speed up land distribution by transferring this function from the states to federal authority. At the same time the autonomous Agrarian Department replaced the National Agrarian Commission, which had been under the control of the minister of agriculture, and the agricultural banks were reorganized so as to make loans to *ejiditarios* an actuality.

Attainment of this objective will leave at least one third of Mexico in private hands, however, and a new and more serious battle will have to be joined with the hacienda in order to aid a million or so agricultural wage earners there. Few of these have been able to take advantage of the provision in the agrarian code of 1934 which permitted them to become members of neighboring villages with *ejidos*.

Between 1915, when Carranza issued the first agrarian decree, and December first, 1934, when Cárdenas was inaugurated, some twenty million acres had been taken from the haciendas and distributed to the pueblos, so that approximately twenty per cent of the inhabitants of Mexico were living in *ejido* villages. But fully fifty per cent of the population were still agricultural wage earners. During the first four years of Cárdenas' term more than thirty million acres were

distributed, a third of these from the forty million acres of arable land in Mexico, the rest from uncleared land. In those four years, then, twenty million acres had been reclaimed, half as much as had been arable under the hacienda system. The Revolution had distributed a grand total of about fifty million acres, roughly one tenth of Mexico's total area, to approximately one and a half million families.

*Ejido*: "the way out." That word has returned to its original literal meaning, if it is true that the Latin *exitus*, as applied to land, dates from medieval Europe, when kings saved the independent towns from complete enclosure and strangulation by granting to each a strip of ground, an outlet, through the feudal estates.

Apart from its *ejido* program, the government has authorized division of some ten million acres of public lands, the *terrenos baldíos*, into farm colonies with a total population of thirty thousand families.

President Cárdenas has fulfilled his campaign promise: "I shall give the peasant a rifle so that he can defend his school and his land." Echo of Zapata's shout! As reserves of the regular army, these armed *campesinos* have an official status as rural defense corps against the white guards of the *hacendados*.

It was this need of defense which led to the formation of the National Peasants' Confederation. The meeting was not altogether peaceable, some delegates walking out in protest at the election of Graciano Sánchez as secretary-general. Professor Sánchez, now head of the autonomous Department of Indian Affairs, hails from Tamaulipas, where he was a rural teacher before becoming an agrarian leader. The dissension seems to have been due to a feeling that the confederation should exclude politicians and others who were not "dirt farmers." Although every state was represented many localities refused to come into the organization because of fear that it would be controlled by politicians.

A moot question on which the confederation took a stand

was that of "small property" versus "*ejido* collectivism." Both Article 27 and the agrarian code make a distinction between the hacienda and farm properties of less than four hundred or, in some cases, two hundred and fifty acres, the size depending on location and nature of the soil. Rights of individuals to these small tracts were protected, since it was believed that they would aid in the breakup of the hacienda system. Some have done so; some have aided, willingly or unwillingly, in its preservation. Many of these small property holders are genuine *rancheros*: ranchers, as we use the word, picturesque figures on Sundays and holidays, when they get into their tight-fitting *charro* outfits and ride into town; or plain farmers with only their families to help them till the soil. Others are primarily businessmen, often not living on the land, who employ farm hands and thus become opponents of organized labor. Still others are straw men of the *hacendados*, for more than one of the latter has anticipated the parceling out of his estate by having it registered as a number of "small properties" under as many different names. Many small farmers have let their properties become mere appendages of haciendas by borrowing. They are but share croppers—without the legal protection that an out-and-out *mediero* has.

Many Mexican economists have observed the success of individual farming in such countries as Denmark and Holland and honestly believe that this can be repeated in Mexico. They see the small proprietor, if encouraged, becoming a strong middle class and making for stability. Their arguments have been taken up by men who hope thereby to split the agrarian ranks, as well as by men who, it is said, would like to make use of the small proprietors (still more often *mestizo* than Indian, by the way) to establish a Fascist dictatorship.

Prominent defenders of the cause of the small landholder are: General Gildardo Magaña, governor of Michoacán, who sponsored the organization of eight thousand of them into the League of Small Proprietors; Ramón Yocupicio, governor of Sonora, who has been a harsh foe of organized labor; the

Tamaulipas trio, Graciano Sánchez, Governor Marte Gómez and—last but by no means least—Emilio Portes Gil.

The Peasants' Confederation stood with the Cárdenas administration in declaring that the salvation of agrarianism lies in the *ejidos*, organized on a co-operative system of industrialized farming. It voiced the wish that all small properties be restricted to the size of the *ejidos* and that the holders of the former enjoy no more privileges than the latter. It called for redrafting of the agrarian laws with a view to bringing share cropping, renting, colonization and subdivision sections under the *ejido* system. The Revolution, in its agrarian aspect, must eliminate all economic subordination of man to man; the *ejido* must become the sole form of economic-technical exploitation of the soil.

The principal experiments in collective farming have been in the Laguna cotton district of Coahuila and Durango and in the henequen fields of Yucatán. In 1936, following a strike of workers on the cotton haciendas, President Cárdenas expropriated six hundred thousand acres of the fertile alluvial soil of the Nazas and Aguanaval rivers and personally supervised its distribution into co-operative farms for thirty thousand families. (Five families had controlled it.) The government shipped in seeds and machinery, organized schools and consumers' co-operatives. Loans amounting to nearly thirty million pesos were made by the newly established National Bank of *Ejido* Credit.

By the summer of 1937 the Laguna experiment was adjudged successful enough to justify its application to Yucatán, where Governor Felipe Carrillo Puerto had stepped in to save the sisal industry with state control during the period of postwar deflation. About seventy per cent of Yucatán's henequen acreage is now being cultivated collectively, with the state government managing the industry under the form of an Association of Henequen Producers. The necessity for special machinery in the manufacture of finished products from the raw fiber had always kept control of the industry in the



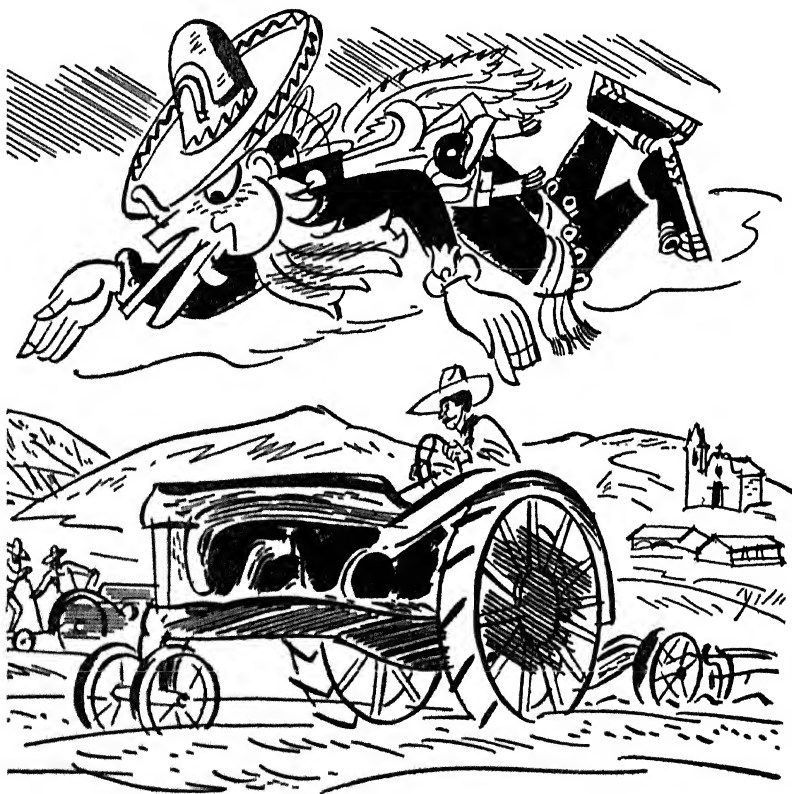
hands of a few. The state has made such machinery available to the *ejidos*, to small proprietors and to plantations.

Diversification of crops has been an object of the new system both in La Laguna and in Yucatán.

These experiments have been hotly attacked and just as hotly defended. The critic most frequently heard from is Luis Cabrera, minister of finance in the Carranza cabinet and now spokesman for the ideals of 1910—or for the landed and corporate interests, as you please. In these collective-farming projects Señor Cabrera sees the *encomienda* system being re-established. Their organizers and



officials of the *Banco Nacional de Crédito Ejidal* will soon usurp control, he says. Color was lent to this prediction by charges on the floor of congress in September 1938 that peasants were finding fault with the bank. The Ministry of Finance and a congressional committee reported after an investigation that the majority of complaints were not against the bank or its personnel, but in reality consisted of pressing petitions for drilling of new water wells, construction and repair of living quarters, etc. Emilio Acosta, the *hacendado* who had asked for the investigation, signed the committee's report.



Water is the most serious problem in the Laguna region, and in the summer of 1937 rainfall was scant, resulting in some discouraging times early in 1938. El Palmito dam, scheduled for completion in 1940, will at least regulate and conserve the present water supply. In 1938 the yield per acre of cotton, wheat and rice was increased over that of the previous year, surpassing the average yield on non-*ejido* farms and on haciendas, but the opposition seized on the fall in production of corn and beans. The government replied that the peasants' standard of living had been raised and that now they were eating more of these prime foodstuffs, whereas before they had had to sacrifice their stomachs for the market.

The fate of these experiments is on the lap of many gods besides Tlaloc. Nowhere has collective farming been under way long enough to have had a fair trial. It has called for large expenditures, as has the construction of rural schools at the rate of two thousand a year during the Cárdenas administration. The obligation assumed by the government to pay compensation to the holders of railroad bonds, to the oil companies and former landholders for expropriated property, plus the loss of the United States silver market: all have kept the sword of Damocles, in the shape of a severe economic crisis, hanging over the head of Cárdenas. The first of July 1940 Mexico goes to the polls to choose his successor. Former Minister of National Defense Manuel Ávila Camacho, the P.R.M. candidate, is being opposed by General Juan Andreu Almazán, known as a friend of Big Business.

Meanwhile conflicting reports come out of Mexico. "Dictatorship of the proletariat," foreign industrialists say, with Calles, of the Cárdenas regime. With markets in the democratic countries closed, the Mexican government barter its oil to the totalitarian nations—and Cárdenas is said to be gravitating toward Berlin, Rome and Tokyo. One hears that Cárdenas is dominated by Lombardo Toledano, admirer of Soviet Russia. The Communist party, which announced after the inauguration of Cárdenas that it would give him qualified

support, demands that he turn Trotsky away from Mexico. Cárdenas refuses. Lombardo Toledano makes the same demand, calling Trotsky "an enemy of Mexico, enemy of anti-Fascist action, standard-bearer for the enemies of the world proletariat." Cárdenas still refuses. One hears that Trotsky dominates Cárdenas through Francisco Múgica and that Lombardo Toledano will soon go the way of Garrido Canabal, Calles and Saturnino Cedillo. One hears that Francisco Múgica is not the mouthpiece of Trotsky, but of Stalin . . .

Much of the confusion arises from an attempt to fit the Mexican system into one of the ideologies of Europe. There is Fascism in Mexico unquestionably, not breeding among Italians and Germans so much as among *hacendados* and ambitious generals, long Mexico's bane. If their traditional partner, the Church, is in a quandary, they can look for support to the *Callistas*, whose power was scotched but not destroyed by the exile of their chief. There is adherence to Stalin among the intellectuals of the C.T.M. But the Mexico of Lázaro Cárdenas is essentially a product of Mexico, not something transplanted from Europe.

"Our Revolution has been like an earthquake, a cataclysm that has shaken all of our social classes," commented Soto y Gama a few years ago. "I have called it an earthquake. And what happens during an earthquake? The houses fall down, public order is destroyed, the churches crumble to the ground; and here I will repeat what a poor Indian said after the earthquake in Oaxaca. 'Todo lo hemos perdido, menos la santita.' (We have lost everything except the little saint.) And so with us. We have lost everything except the conquests of the Revolution."

The great conquest of the Revolution was a return to Indian values, concretely expressed in that pre-Conquest institution, the *ejido*. There is no wall around Mexico, of course, but whatever form its national life ultimately assumes it is going to have its roots in Mexican soil, like corn and the maguery. The issue was decided during the days of Cortés

and the viceroys, when the Spaniards failed to annihilate either the Indian or his culture. Now Mexico is an Indian country, where the white man is rapidly being bred out.

In a postscript to *Panchito Chapopote*, Xavier Icaza has voices demanding Mexico's attention. Through a loud-speaker on Ixtaccihuatl comes one voice:

"'Attention. Attention. An Italian at the microphone. The most popular journalist. The one who has visited the most countries, the war correspondent, the journalist Barzini wishes to speak. Attention, attention. Listen to the advice of Barzini. He is going to advise Mexico. . . .

"'Mexicans: Learn from Argentina, from the Yankees, from Chile. Learn from Brazil . . . Emigration, immigration. Colonization. Money. Highways. Railroads. Banks. . . .'

"Yawns among the public. Hisses. Whistles from the left:

"'He's a Fascist. He's a reactionary. We want something new. We must be creators. He's talking rot. . . .'

"The loud-speaker is silent.

"The people pay no attention. They laugh, dance or cry. They shrug their shoulders. *El indio triste* goes on sighing, an enigma. The Mexican Night continues.

"Suddenly people are startled by the insistent calling of another loud-speaker. It is on the peak of Orizaba:

"'Moscow speaking. Lenin speaking. Attention, attention. Lenin speaking.' (Thunder. Lightning. Sparks. Proletarian cannon.) The notes of the 'Internationale' are heard. 'He is going to commence! He is going to commence!'

"The loud-speaker is turned toward the sea. Facing it, her back to the sea, Vera Cruz listens.

"'Lenin speaking.' He recites the Socialist gospel. He repeats the 'capital' of old Marx. He preaches the Revolution; the class struggle.

"Sound of the 'Internationale.' Hammer and sickle. Health and Social Revolution.

"Vera Cruz does not merely listen. It does not know how to do so. It does not meditate. Through its veins runs the

fire of the tropics. Vera Cruz translates everything into action. It obeys the speech without comprehending it very well. It invents laws, laws, laws. Vera Cruz is the legislator of Mexico: Labor Law, Renter's Law, Projects of petroleum laws, distribution of land, obligatory land rental, Sunday rest, profit sharing, Padlock Law, Hunger Law and agitation, revolution, agitation . . .

"It does not know moderation. It ignores halfway measures. It forgets the constitution. Some of the radical laws are not fulfilled—cannot be fulfilled. . . .

"The people shrug. The peasants organize and arm themselves.

"In the rest of the country, indifference. One does not like to discuss or realize ideas. One remains deaf to the philosopher, to the journalist, to the hero. The people pay no attention. They laugh, dance or cry, attentive to the needs of the day.

"Only the election groups discuss. Some play with Bolshevism, some with Socialism, others with cards.

"The people, the Indian really, shrug their shoulders. . . .

"'Words, words, words!' cries Diego Rivera, climbing the Pyramids of Teotihuacán. 'Those are only talkers.'

"Diego Rivera strikes sparks from the top of the Pyramid of the Sun with his cane of Apizaco.

"'We must act,' he cries, 'not talk. The Indian is indifferent because he is too intelligent and knows that words are cheap. We must act. We must create. We must be Mexicans. . . . Let us learn from the pyramid builders. Let us continue their interrupted work. Let us perform Mexican work. It must be of the country. We must express Mexico.'

"Crowds of creators have assembled at the foot of the pyramid. Painters, a few writers, agricultural experts, school-teachers, all resolved on performing Mexican work.

"Diego Rivera descends with sure step, his head held high. The crowd applauds.

"The pyramids seem to come to life. Something floats in the air. The eagle and serpent are triumphant upon a red sun.

A holocaust flares upon the pyramid. A violent gust of wind extinguishes it, and fires appear upon the mountain peaks that tower over the valley. The prophecies are fulfilled. The air trembles. It is Quetzalcoatl coming back to live among his people. . . .”



## CHAPTER XXII

# The Marigolds of Mitla

*Once again upon his journey  
Quetzalcoatl staid his footsteps;  
Lingered in another region;  
Builted houses subterranean,  
Edifices far outreaching,  
Underneath the earth extending.  
And the territory named he;  
And henceforth they called it Mictlan;  
Called it place of the departed.*

SOUTHEAST of the City of Oaxaca is a valley some thirty miles long and from two to twelve miles wide, whose floor, dusty in winter, alternately muddy and sun-cracked in summer, holds more than twenty towns of stone and adobe



houses fenced by organ cactus. Here, surrounded by roses and mangoes, stands the great tree of Tule and his "son," sheltering the white chapel that some call the Church of the Virgin of the Assumption and some the Church of the Tree. In the shade of the "old, old man" a religious organization known as the Pilgrims of Tlacolula gives each October an elaborate performance of the Dance of the Feathers. The churches in this lively valley more than make up in color for what they lack in gold leaf and tiles. The whitewashed façades of those at Santa María del Tule and Tlacolula in particular, with their friezes painted red and blue and yellow with never a clash, are to me more fascinating than Santo Domingo in Oaxaca, which many consider the most splendid Catholic edifice in Mexico. Perhaps some Dominican friars suspected why their Zapotec converts were so eager to use paintbrushes beside the road that leads to Mitla.

In a depression at the head of the valley lies this singular town, singular because the ancient city of Lyobaa, Zapotec equivalent of Mictlan, was not intended for the accommodation of the living so much as for that of the souls of the dead. And the souls of all Zapotecan people, whether of valley or of mountain, are still believed to come to rest at Mitla, their "earth-strong pueblo."

The annals of Mitla are short. Lyobaa was captured by an army of the Aztec ruler, Ahuitzol, in 1494, but until the coming of the Spaniards the Zapotecs continued to govern themselves, paying Tenochtitlán a light tribute of gold, blankets, cochineal dye, corn and beans. The Zapotecs suffered less from Spanish armies than did the Aztecs. While Mitla was one of the pueblos granted to Cortés, fortunately for the inhabitants the locality contained few of the resources which the *encomenderos* were interested in exploiting.

The Mitleyenos, living at the junction of trade routes between north and south, were then as now businessmen rather than farmers. In that respect they are not representative Mexican villagers.

Mitla today, with a population of over 2500, is a town of the eighteenth and earlier centuries, being galvanized by the twentieth. About half its able-bodied men are traveling merchants, mulcteers or *arrieros*. During the dry season the *comerciantes ambulantes* cross the mountains with small merchandise from Oaxaca and bring back coffee, which they sell to Mitla's two wholesale dealers, making thirty or forty pesos on a month's travel. Most of the farming is done in the summer. Private and public ownership of land exist side by side at Mitla. Valley fields and dwelling sites are the property of individuals. The *ejido* consists of land in the mountains and in the foothills about the town. Any "son of the town" may appropriate any part of it for the clearing; he may help himself to wood, stone, whatever he wants there. The cliff in the bend of the Río Grande, one of the three shallow streams which run through the town, is set apart as a source of supply for adobes and mud bricks for public buildings. Four fields, collectively owned, comprise the land of the *Santo*. Until 1930 this was collectively farmed, and no private harvesting could be done until the Saint's crop was in. Now the Saint's fields are worked on half shares and the town as a whole no longer takes part in the harvesting.

Dr Elsie Clews Parsons found that for the most part Robert Redfield's analysis for Tepoztlán holds true in Mitla. The town's material culture is largely Indian, characterized by a comparative lack of economic specialization. There are exceptions, of course, as the motorist may notice even as he wonders why, if this is Mitla, those much-talked-of monuments aren't in sight. For instance, he has passed some fields of wheat, alfalfa and chick-peas, European crops, and he has honked at a cow or two. (He will find, however, that corn and beans are still Mitla's stand-bys and that milk is not drunk, even by babies, because Mitleyenos don't like its taste.) On more than half the houses tiles have replaced the eaved thatch of *cullarilla* or *tule*, mountain and river plants respectively. The rose-colored belts which all the women wear,

although woven on the ancient Indian loom, are of wool and within the last fifteen years have taken the place of native fiber belts with animal, bird and geometric designs.

In psychological attitudes and in social organization Mitleyenos are more Spanish than Zapotec—again with exceptions, of which the pre-Conquest features of the *ejido* and of co-operative work are obvious. The Indian does not share the absorption of Spaniard and *mestizo* in sex, so Mitla is going to be greatly puzzled at seeing so much fuss made over the subject in the films which Hollywood and Mexico City producers send her. Physical contacts are repugnant to Indians everywhere, I think. Two Mitleyenos will not join in the Spanish *abrazo* at meeting, although they may give the forward movement of the body, first on one side, then on the other, without actually touching each other. If they shake hands palm will barely meet palm—exactly in the manner of two Choctaws.

There are some twenty *temazcales* in Mitla, of stones, cemented with mud. Into these sweat baths Zapotec midwives take women in confinement, as Aztec midwives took them into "the flowery house of God."

Spaniards didn't establish the custom of making wedding bouquets of red fandango flowers and yellow *flores del Niño* from a particular old garden in the mountains north of Mitla. Dominicans didn't dictate the association of camomile with the saints in general, of the red lily with San José, of the white lily with San Pedro, of the poinsettia with Santa Catarina, of yellow marigolds with the souls of the dead.

In pre-Columbian times social distinctions among Indians were ceremonial rather than economic or political. Mitla today is democratic, innocently so. The wealth of one family group is an economic matter and sets no standards. Dr Parsons got to know the Mitleyenos better than any casual visitor can hope to do. "Condemnation falls on one who is *egoísta*, self-seeking and competitive," she says, "on the *ambicioso*, the grasping or greedy, and most of all on the *invidioso*, the envious man who fails to act in ways enabling all 'the sons of

the town' to have equal opportunities as well as equal obligations. *Muy miserable* is the one possessed of these traits of competitiveness, greed and envy whether he or she be president or member of a prestigious family or the mother of San Pedro or the baker who cheats the Holy Child of his loaf. The opposite of the *hombre miserable* is the *hombre honrado* who lives and lets live, is liberal and welcoming, *cariñoso*, who is *humilde*, neither quarrelsome nor cantankerous, who is *buena gente*. The terms are Spanish, but the evaluation, I think, is characteristically Indian. It is based on a person's conduct, not on his opinions or on his emotional reactions except as expressed in conduct."

Two counter influences are at work in Mitla. The population is on the increase, and in the ordinary course of events a line would be drawn sooner or later between *los correctos*, the "correct" people, and *los tontos*, the "ignorant" ones. Kingpin of the former, the wearers of shoes and black trousers, would be Don Luis Inñarritu Flores, whose father bought the Hacienda de Xaaga, where the early Dominicans built a monastery with the stones of Zapotec palaces. Unless the agrarian laws have altered conditions in Mitla recently Don Luis has over two hundred share croppers working on his estate. I have never laid eyes on this *hacendado*, although I saw his Rolls-Royce when I visited the cruciform Zapotec tomb beneath the old monastery. Dr Parsons describes him as "florid faced, vigorous, masterful, *muy español*," and says that the Mitleyenos told her that he is destined to be shot someday. In fact he did serve as a target once, while he was making a speech at Tlacolula. His mouth being open, the bullet went in one cheek and came out the other.

The son of Don Luis married the daughter of Victor Olivera, the town's entrepreneur and (so far) solitary advance guard of capitalism. A white man, of course? No, so far as blood is concerned Victor is pure Zapotec. Yet through purchase or foreclosure of mortgages he has acquired two ranches and a great deal of land in and adjacent to Mitla.

He owns two town houses and two stores. He has installed a mill, which grinds out a bowlful of *nixtamal* for four centavos and which supplies fifteen customers with electric lights. He has been municipal president several times, maybe he still is. He is responsible for the substitution of motion pictures for dances on the Saint's day.

Victor is learning English. I am sure he will have modern tourist courts ready for the opening of the Pan American Highway through Oaxaca. He will have red signs pointing the way to the ruins of ancient Lyobaa, which lie close to the earth on the northern edge of the *barrio* of San Pablo. The four principal ruins, that is. The city of the dead must have covered the entire end of the valley, for traces of it extend to the hill two miles to the west where a fort opposed Mixtec raids and the Aztec invasion.

The rose-colored Church of San Pablo covers one "palace," as these flat-topped quadrangular structures built of stone on low terraces are called by archaeologists to differentiate them from the temples which were perched on top of Aztec and Maya pyramids. For information as to their use we have to rely mostly on Father Burgoa, who didn't write until the seventeenth century and who may have been drawing on his imagination as well as on documents and traditions:

"One of the rooms above ground was the palace of the high priest, where he sat and slept, for the apartment offered room and opportunity for everything. The throne was like a high cushion with a high back to lean against, all of tiger skin, stuffed entirely with delicate feathers or with fine grass which was used for this purpose. The other seats were smaller, even when the king came to visit him. The authority of this devilish priest was so great that there was no one who dared to cross the court, and to avoid this the other three chambers had doors in the rear, through which the kings entered. . . .

"The second chamber above ground was that of the priests and the assistants to the high priests. The third was that of

the king when he came. The fourth was that of the other chieftains and captains . . . All the rooms were clean and well furnished with mats. It was not the custom to sleep on bedsteads, however great a lord might be. They used very tastefully braided mats, which were spread on the floor, and soft skins of animals killed in the hunt: deer, rabbits, armadillos, etc., and also birds, which they killed with snares or arrows."

The walls tell a story of their own. Inside and out they are decorated with panels containing intricate stone mosaics. At first sight these geometrical forms, mostly grecques attached to a step design, might be taken for weird hieroglyphs. Then traces of red paint stand out upon the background and, picturing these walls colored red or cream-white against red, one realizes that all the designs are textile patterns worked out in stone. The resting place of the souls must be gay, of course, and "homey," so it was made to look as if it were hung with the brightest of tapestries. Viewed from the mountains, Mitla must have been one huge red blanket laid upon the gray plain. The traveler who wrote of it, "The gloomy aspect of the locality accords well with the dread significance of the name," missed the point entirely.

Yet here at Mitla one is brought close to a salient feature of Mexico: the acceptance of death as having no "dread significance." Mitla is Indian, therefore she lives intimately with death, wears the red blanket gracefully but matter-of-factly, without need of pose for reassurance. As Mitla becomes *mestizo* intimacy will become familiarity—the *vacilada*—and the blanket will be flaunted. It will not have then the color of the clay of the earth so much as that of blood. Mitleyenos say calmly that a local politician is going to come to a violent end one of these days. They don't emphasize as yet how very funny it is that a *político* should be shot in the mouth while he's making a speech.

A change is already observable, I think, in the attitude

toward the Pillar of Death, in the cruciform chamber beneath the middle palace. ("Low bridge!" the custodian has learned to warn just before you bump your head on the stone lintel.) According to Burgoa, this *crucero* was reserved for the bodies of the sacrificed and of the captains killed in war and was called "the sepulcher of the blessed." Persons who felt themselves incurably sick would ask to be immured there, where they would have a direct passage over the flowery pathway to the gods. Mitleyenos believe that prisoners of war were bound for sacrifice to the monolith which supports the roof. More likely *la columna de la muerte* gets its name from the tradition that it serves as an indicator for death. Every visitor is expected to embrace it. If your fingertips meet your life is finished. If there is a gap the custodian will measure it with his fingers and notify you how long you are going to live, allowing a year for each of his digits. Undoubtedly this measuring was taken seriously at one time. One hears about the lady who laughed when her fingers touched. The next year her son came to Mitla and said that his mother had died soon after she reached home. The guide has told this story so often, however, that he is growing flippant about it, and I predict that before long there are going to be other and better ones. Yet no one object in Mexico represents death so well as this round gray pillar at the junction of four arms, symbolizing the four directions.

Since the Revolution Mitla's attraction for tourists, Mexican and foreign, and the care taken by the government to preserve the ruins have caused the townspeople to look upon them as what they are: monuments to the peculiar genius of the Zapotec. "All our kings were brought here for burial," Mitleyenos tell you proudly and ask if you have been in the Mexico City restaurant over which glows the rosy Cross of Mitla.

The Dominicans to whom fell the task of converting the Mitleyenos were plagued by the problem of crosses, for the devil seemed to have been more active here than anywhere

else in Mexico, mocking the Christian symbol. The Indians had been in the habit of taking offerings of flowers and copal incense to these cross-shaped tombs and there praying, not *for* the dead, but *to* the dead, asking them for favors. The friars sealed the tombs and, in an effort to draw devotion away from them, erected crosses far and wide—crosses which, having been sprinkled with holy water, the Zapotecs were to understand had a different meaning from the old ones.

Now a cross of stone or plastered brick, blessed by a priest for twenty *reales*, is set in the roof of every adobe house in Mitla. Crosses stand by most roadside springs. During the wake a corpse lies on a cross of lime, covered with flowers. At the close of the novena, the nine days of mourning, the lime cross is buried in the grave. Farmers carry salt and a cross of the holy palm of Palm Sunday to protect themselves from lightning. The sign of the cross is made on all occasions when European Catholics would make it. It is also made over the kernels of corn or the egg used in divination. In curing *el espanto*, "fright," a *curandera* outlines a cross upon the ground and fills it in with black poppies.

Formerly Mitleyenos asked the dead for favors at four places besides the church: at the Lake of White Water and in a cave in the mountains, at the cruciform tomb under the monument and at the Cross of Miracle, on the road leading to Matatlán. The lake dried up several years ago, either because the spring which fed it was not blessed at the proper time or because some goatherds accidentally killed the horned water serpent, which lived there as "mother of the water." The cave, like Oztocteotl's, for some reason or other is no longer visited. The custodian will not allow the burning of candles in the tomb under the palace. So New Year's Eve finds Mitleyenos and pilgrims who have come to Mitla as to "the middle of the world" offering flowers, copal incense and candles at the cross and confidently letting the souls know by means of prayer images what they want during the next twelve months.



It would be interesting to know the history of this Cross of Miracle, whether it actually antedates the introduction of Christianity or whether it is of Dominican manufacture and is the center of such a cult because of some association with its surroundings. Near by is a prehistoric building site, where potsherds may be picked up on mounds as yet unexplored.

About the pediment of *La Cruz* pilgrims represent in miniature the object of their desires: houses, animals, poultry, fields, crops, beehives, money, children. A house is built of twigs and stones. Lemon and orange peels stuck on twigs signify fruit trees. Fields are laid out in even little furrows, with bits of cornstalk or maguey leaves. A pile of rocks stands for money. No soul could mistake the meaning of a tiny cradle.

The souls may well grant the petitions of the living, for two days out of the year, two of the best days, are devoted exclusively to their entertainment: *el Día de Todos Santos*, for those who died as children, and *el Día de las Animas*, for the adult dead. These fall in the intermediate season of clear skies and warm sunshine, before the dust of winter has become thick and powdery.

Walk through the long streets of Mitla on the morning of October thirty-first. The excitement, climax of weeks of preparation, would surely communicate itself to a blind and deaf man. Every broom in town, it seems, is being wielded. From back yards come laughter and the sound of splashing water. Outside the doors of many houses hang crosses of fresh flowers. While the Aztec *cempoalxochitl* is the year-round flower of the dead, here as on the plateau, the Zapotecs use two of their own as well for these particular fiestas: *monjitos*, white orchids, and the *gitohgol*, similar to the yellow marigold but smaller. Sometimes white and yellow petals are being strewn between the cane gate in the cactus hedge and the stone doorstep, so that precious moments will not be lost while a child finds his way into the house. As noon approaches every family in which a child has died should put on brand-new clothing. However, if the best clothes that one already

has are worn, the "little angels" will understand that all the money has been spent on other things.

At noon, by the shadows of the cactus and the great fig tree in the plaza, by the watch of the padre, if he has one, the church bells ring, double quick, and *los angelitos* come trooping home.

The house altar is so beautiful that no member of the family has been able to keep his hands off it. Look at one of the humblest: a couple of planks laid across upright sticks before an unframed colored lithograph of the dead child's saint. Over the planks is spread the best cloth available. Two candles, decorated with flowers and bright ribbons, burn in the mouths of colored glass bottles. Places have been set for the entire family; bread, chocolate and fruit arranged upon dishes which, whatever the other shortcomings of the celebration, must be new. Toys are laid out enticingly. The room is filled with the odor of copal burning in a three-legged clay censer.

"¡Qué bonito!" exclaim relatives and friends as they come to add their gifts—their *carinos*, "affections"—and to have a bite or two with the *angelito*, who is back home, like a child on vacation from school, for twenty-four hours. His name is called. Bread is broken and presented to him. A cup of chocolate and a glass of water are raised to his little lips, carefully lest he spill it as he always did. The most fun comes in showing him the toys. None of the elaborate things that city people can buy—candy funerals on rollers, painted skull masks, cardboard skeletons dancing on wires—but bright little baskets, clay whistles in the form of pigs and owls and ducks, maybe a simple white sugar coffin with a wreath done in yellow icing, maybe some chocolate ribs.

In the afternoon and again the next morning food, flowers and candles are taken to the cemetery, where the family "weeps the bone" over the grave of the *angelito*, covering it with marigolds and orchids, crumbling bread upon it, pouring out chocolate and water.

In many parts of Mexico, especially in Aztec country, food for the dead is prepared late at night—when all the world is at peace—and served on the graves at night. (Wrote Torquemada of the *teocalli* of Mictlanteceutli, Aztec god of the underworld: "All the offerings and sacrifices which were made in his temple were prepared at night and not by day, because, as Our Lord Christ says, 'He who does evil loves the darkness and avoids the light.'") There the adult dead, who come when the "little angels" leave at noon on November first, find candles decorated with black ribbons and flowers of black wax. At 4 A.M. on November second men and boys go through the streets, chanting, "¡Aquí vienen las ánimas benditas!" (Here come the blessed souls!) and solicit from housewives the food that has been presented to the dead. A judicious arrangement, since it would not do for the families of the dead to eat this up, yet Mexicans are no people to let good victuals go to waste for ceremony's sake. What remains on the graves the keeper of the cemetery collects and takes home. So when the adult souls depart at noon the living go about their everyday tasks with full stomachs.

I believe that in Mitla all festivities take place by day and that when Victor's electric lights are turned off at 10 P.M. the town is dark. I am really in no position to say what happened in Mitla the night of November first, however, as Luis and I had gone to drink mescal with his brother that afternoon.

Luis is a native Mitleyeno, now living in Oaxaca, with whom, through the kindness of a third party, I had driven over to Mitla. Only by degrees did the reason for his visit come out. On the road he played up to what he took for granted was my attitude toward this fiesta by affecting to be amused, in a tolerant and slightly apologetic way, by these beliefs concerning the *tobgol*, "the dead old ones." A few hours in his old haunts—and a few drinks—made him a "son of the pueblo" again, and I discovered that he had really been so anxious to come to Mitla on this occasion because he

had a brother buried there. The two young fellows, both bachelors, had lived together until Rafael had "moved his *petate*" six months before. I think that Luis in private ascribed his brother's death to an attack by *los aires*, the evil spirits of the air. Later I picked up enough Mitla gossip to learn that Rafael was a heavy drinker and that on the night "the airs" were supposed to have got him he was sleeping off a bottle or two of mescal in a damp field. So I judge that a severe cold or pneumonia carried him away.

Confidence comes easily when mescal is at work, and it was only natural that Luis should invite me to "weep his brother's bone" with him. He had brought from Oaxaca a loaf of *pan de muerto*, "dead man's bread," a big round loaf with a knob on top for a skull and twists in the crust for arms and legs. With this, a bunch of yellow flowers and a bottle of mescal, we went to the cemetery early in the afternoon. Since Rafael in life had liked the liquor distilled from the head of the maguey his returning soul must be toasted with it.

I think that sooner or later a picnic party assembled about every grave there. On either side of the one to which Luis led the way was a large family group. The person being feted by one of these must have been inordinately fond of tamales, for the woman was arranging them by the dozen among loose orchids, tamales appearing to better advantage with white flowers than with yellow. Grief? I cannot say I saw any manifested. One elderly woman, alone by a mound that looked as if it had been there for a long time, sat staring into space, but her expression was that of one daydreaming. Most of the people chatted happily although, except for a roving band of small boys, the carnival spirit of other fiestas was lacking.

Luis laid his flowers and bread upon the grave, but it was plain that he knew his brother's interest would lie, not in them, but in the mescal. He poured out half a tumblerful or so, then passed the bottle to me. When he had had a drink I extended a package of cigarettes, curious to see what he would do. "*Uno para él*," he said, taking two. "One for him."

He lighted them both and placed one on the edge of the flat tombstone. The only feeling of queerness that I had all afternoon was at sight of the smoke of that Camel rising in a wavering little spiral, then steadying as Luis and I sat upon the warm ground and leaned back against the grave. Luis began reminiscing at once about Rafael, particularly about the good times they had had together while drunk and about the other's experiences down in Tehuantepec. Rafael had been at intervals a *comerciante ambulante*. I suppose that is how Luis came to tell me a story whose ending contained an idea about the souls that I had never heard before.

"A merchant of Mitla was starting on a trip," said Luis. "He left all his money with his wife and told her to take good care of it. While he was gone he got word that she was very sick. He hurried home but could not find her, so he went and asked his mother where his wife was. 'She is at home,' his mother told him. 'Sit down and eat. In a few minutes she will come.' The man said that he would not eat until he had seen his wife. So his mother said: 'My son, I will tell you the plain truth. Your wife is dead.' The merchant went off crying and got drunk. That night, while he was going along the street, very drunk, he saw an owl and began to throw stones at it. 'Why do you want to kill me?' the owl asked him. 'Because I don't care what I do,' replied the man. 'I am tired of living. I would like to talk with my wife, who is dead.' 'Then come with me,' said the owl. 'I will take you to the town of the souls.'"

Luis paused at the approach of the gang of boys, who had had their eyes on us for some time. "*Soy alma bendita*," one sang out. "I am a blessed soul. Give me a drink." Luis tossed the bread to him and went on with his story:

"The owl took the merchant to a strange town where the bell in the church was ringing for mass. 'Wait here,' the owl said. 'Your wife will come this way to attend mass. Stick two thorns in the form of a cross in the end of her *rebozo* and later she will return to this spot to see you.' The merchant

did this, but when his wife came back after mass she had a man with her. 'What are you doing here?' she asked her husband. 'It is not time yet for you to come to this place.' 'I have come because I love you,' he said, 'and because I want to know where you put the money I left with you.' The woman told him where she had buried the money in the kitchen floor, then went on with the other man. This made the merchant very angry. He followed the pair and, when he had seen them go into a house together, he set fire to it. He came back to the place where the owl was waiting and told him what he had done. The owl gave a cry. 'I should not have brought you here! Don't you know what you have done? You have burned your own house.'"

Luis poured mescal on his brother's grave, only a small drink, for the supply was running low.

"From this," he said, "we know that the souls live in the same house with us."

Despedida:

(from a Mexican *corrido*)

*If I molested my hearer  
While I was singing this song,  
Let me beg to be forgiven,  
As I intended no wrong.*





















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